

**A genealogy of the embodied  
theatre practices of  
Suzanne Bing and Michael Chekhov:  
the use of play in actor training**

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# Contents

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**Abstract**

**Acknowledgements**

**Preface** **i-xi**

**Introduction** **1-28**

1. Introduction
2. Case studies
  - 2.1 Copeau's Bing.... Or Bing's Copeau?
  - 2.2 Kaleidoscopic Chekhov
3. Genealogy as Methodology and New Forms of Feminist Historiography
4. Foucault's Notion of Genealogy
5. Genealogies of Embodied Practice
6. Feminist Forms of Historiography
7. Expellees and Unbelonging
8. The Structure of the Thesis

**Chapter 1: Tangled Taxonomies and Literature** **29-72**

1. Introduction
2. Tracing the Field
3. Embodied Theatre
4. Tangled Taxonomies
  - 4.1 Mime
  - 4.2 Total Theatre
  - 4.3 Dance-Theatre
  - 4.4 Visual Theatre
  - 4.5 Physical Theatres
  - 4.6 Movement for Actors

- 4.7 Psychophysical Acting
- 5. Honing the Focus: Embodied Theatre
- 6. Literature
  - 6.1 Suzanne Bing
  - 6.2 Michael Chekhov
- 7. Writing about Embodied Theatre

## **Chapter 2: Mapping Embodied Play Methods**

**73-118**

- 1. Introduction
- 2. From Embodied Theatre to Embodied Play
- 3. Tracing the Play Terrain
- 4. Expanding the Notion of Play
- 5. Chekhov's Embodied Play
- 6. Re-considering Bing's Embodied Play
- 7. Embodied Play as a Principle
- 8. Rules, Frames and Ways of Playing
- 9. Teaching Embodied Play: Systems or Approaches?
- 10. Play Frames and Tools
- 11. Progressive Pedagogy and Play
- 12. The Potentiality of Play
- 13. Pre-requisites for Play?
- 14. Playful Modes and Styles of Performance
- 15. Playing Outside Theatrical Parameters
- 16. Risky Play, Dark Play and Psychodynamics

## **Chapter 3: Chekhov's Embodied Play**

**119-161**

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Playing with the Imaginary Centre
  - 2.1 Playing to Develop Imaginatively-embodied Skills and Attitudes
  - 2.2 Playing with Sound, Voice and Word
  - 2.3. Play and the Flow Experience
  - 2.4 Features and Forms of Play in the Imaginary Centre

- 2.5. Playing with Difference and Transformation
- 2.6 Play and Ego Control
- 2.7 Creating with the Imaginary Centre
- 3. Other Methods of Embodied Play
  - 3.1 Playing with Psychological Gesture
  - 3.2 Playing with Objective Atmosphere
  - 3.3 Playing as Clowns
- 4. A Playful Technique
- 5. Playful Analysis
- 6. Chekhov's Play-enabling Style
- 7. Different Routes to an Embodied Play Consciousness

## **Chapter 4: Bing's Embodied Play and Obscured (Her)stories 162-234**

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Bing: The Obscured (Her)story of the Embodiment of Play
- 3. Bing's Embodied Play and Transformations
- 4. Early Collaborations in Embodied Play
  - 4.1 Working with Jouvett and Dullin
  - 4.2 Early experiments with Copeau at the Club de Gymnastique Rhythmique
- 5. Bing's playful experiments and acts of cross-fertilisation
  - 5.1 Bing and Naumburg
    - 5.1.1 Bing and Naumburg: Somatic Awareness, Habit and Neutrality
    - 5.1.2 Another Forgotten Her-Story
    - 5.1.3 Naumburg's Extended Play
  - 5.2 Bing and Marie-Hélène Dasté
    - 5.2.1 Female Archivists and Publishing Catalysts
  - 5.3 Bing and Howarth
  - 5.4 Play in the Paris school; Training and Making (1920-1924)
  - 5.5 Play in Burgundy
- 6. Objects and Play
- 7. Animals and Play

8. Rhythmic Play
9. Play-enabling
10. Gender, Play and Absence

## **Chapter 5: Extending Embodied Play**

**235-293**

1. Introduction
2. Playmates and Cross-fertilisation
  - 2.1 Bing's Playmates
  - 2.2 Chekhov's Playmates
3. Pedagogues Enabling Extended Play
4. Extending Play through Fantastical Frames
  - 4.1 Fairytales, Folktales and Myths as Frames for Fantastic Extended Play
  - 4.2 Character Type and Mask as Catalysts for Extended Play
5. Extending Play in Basic Frames
  - 5.1 Sailors and Fishers
  - 5.2 Other Simple Frames for Extended Play
  - 5.3 Internally Generated Frames for Extended Play
  - 5.4 Bing: Taking Extended Play into Public Performance
6. Extended Play with Texts and Writers
  - 6.1 Compagnie des Quinze: 'Writing' Embodied Play
  - 6.2 Chekhov: Extending Play with Texts
    - 6.2.1 Radical Application of Embodied Play: Turning Play-scripts into Play-frames
    - 6.2.2 Taking 'Liberties' with Adaptation
    - 6.2.3 Playing with Writers
  - 6.3 Chekhov: Taking Extended Play into Public Performance

## **Conclusion**

**294-312**

1. Introduction
2. Genealogies of Embodied Play and Devised Theatre
3. Genealogical Traces and Transformations of Chekhov's Embodied Play

4. Genealogical Traces and Transformations of Bing's Embodied Play
5. Le Jeu into Embodied Play
6. Embodied Theatre: Strands of Physical Theatres
7. The Politics of Embodied Play and Embodied Theatre
8. Quiet Radicals

## **Appendices**

Appendix I	Training Pathways – Bing	313-317
Appendix II	Training Pathways – Chekhov	318-320
Appendix III	Play and Professional Repertoire	321-325
Appendix IV	Play and Autocours	326-327
Appendix V	Chekhov's World of Gesture and Archetype	328-334
Appendix VI	Bing's Embodied Play with Mask	335-340
Appendix VII	Fairytale and Folklore	341-342
Appendix VIII	The Fishers' Scene	343-345
Appendix IX	Les Copiaus and Compagnie des Quinze	356-349

<b>Bibliography</b>		<b>350-372</b>
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# Abstract

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This project investigates the previously unrecognised significance of the ways in which the Embodied Theatre practices of Suzanne Bing (1885-1967) and Michael Chekhov (1891-1955) utilised forms of what I term Embodied Play as a constituent part of their actor training processes.

A methodology is developed in the introduction which draws on Foucault's notion of genealogy and Feminist approaches to historiography in order to trace and review accounts of these often marginalised play practices in order to re-configure the contributions of Bing and Chekhov in historical terms. It also challenges notions of authenticity and singular 'ownership' of technique by considering the importance of collaborative cross-fertilisation with other practitioners.

This research includes a broader exploration of the literature, histories and discourses about the variety of practices that are often problematically classified as Physical Theatre in relation to the identification of the key components of Bing and Chekhov's pedagogy. The first chapter presents this mapping in tandem with the argument that McDermott's term of Embodied Theatre is more appropriate for Bing and Chekhov's practice. The second chapter further refines the frame of analysis to Embodied Play. Chapters three and four consider how Chekhov and Bing respectively used forms of Embodied Play. Chapter five considers how Bing and Chekhov extended their methods of Embodied Play in training which led to radical approaches to working collaboratively with text and writers. It concludes that this movement from the use of play solely for the acquisition of discrete skill or character creation to extended forms of Embodied Play enabled them to train actors to work as empowered creators of small-scale performance in their Schools/Studios, and ultimately to engage in devising processes for professional productions. Consequently, this helps to fill the gap in scholarship on the early experiments

in devised Embodied Theatre.

In conclusion the focus on Bing addresses the either inadequate, or absent, analyses of her practice in many of the existing historical studies which are dominated by the patrilineal narratives of Jacques Copeau and Michel Saint-Denis. The consideration of Chekhov's practice also challenges the current discourse on play centring on Le Jeu and presents the argument for an expanded term able to consider different artists not just those from the French male lineage. Concurrently, this focus on Chekhov's use of Embodied Play has added to the scholarship on his pedagogic and theatre-making practices.



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## Preface

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This thesis investigates and analyses the ways in which the Embodied Theatre practices of Suzanne Bing and Michael Chekhov utilised forms of embodied play as an integral part of their actor training processes. The work of Bing in general, and Chekhov's use of embodied play, has not been adequately recognised and has therefore existed in the margins of actor training histories. Therefore this study uses a methodology that draws on both Foucault's notion of genealogy (1977) and feminist forms of historiography (Scott, 1999) and presents a contrast to many traditional histories which, as Foucault notes, involves historians pretending to '[examine] things furthest from themselves' (1977A, p.155). In contrast, this thesis examines two genealogical webs of actor training practice which are very close to my own training and work as an arts practitioner and teacher over the past 27 years. Consequently, there is an explicit interconnection between my personal (embodied) experiences of practice and the subject of this academic study, and it therefore seems appropriate to preface this thesis by presenting a brief trace of my work and the way it informs the feminist methodologies I am using.

After training in dance from the age of 3, my introduction to acting came at 11 through the outreach programme at the Tricycle Theatre in Kilburn, North West London. Through the Tricycle I also gained professional film work as a young actor in the early 1980s. I went on to train for four years at the Weekend Arts College in North West London in acting, modern mime (French tradition), movement for actors, dance and singing. In the 1980s the college was offering a progressive syllabus as much of the training centred on devised Dance-Theatre/Physical Theatre practices. Consequently my early training was as an actor as 'creator', in addition to being 'an interpreter' and this quality can be seen in many of the college's former students.<sup>1</sup> In the late 1980s I was a

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<sup>1</sup> An interesting example in this respect is Marianne Jean-Baptiste, who studied at WAC prior to attending RADA, as she became famous for her work with Mike Leigh who uses extensive improvisation in his stage and film practice, i.e. actors are 'creators'. Jean-Baptiste collaborated as an actor/devisor with Leigh on *It's a Great Big Shame* (stage, 1993), *Secrets & Lies* (film, 1996) and she composed the score for his film *Career Girls* (1997).

member of, what was then defined as a 'Dance-Theatre' company and performed in a wide repertoire of shows at venues across the UK. This was a seminal experience and raised questions for me about the way in which we understood and described these physicalised performances. The repertoire included a mixture of director/choreographer-led and devised material. A number of the productions were firmly placed within the 'dance' category (e.g. one was created by choreographers from the Jiving Lindy Hoppers), whilst other pieces were categorised as Modern Mime. The most significant experience for me was working with David Glass on a show which was a blend of Lecoq-based Modern Mime, dancing, masked chorus work and song. The features of this work which came to shape my later practice were the highly embodied and transformational form of acting which involved human characterisation but also non-human representation. For example, at points I played a passion fruit tree, a monkey, and a car-chorus. Most of the material was generated from a devised and highly playful process in response to pre-existing text. During this period 'Physical Theatre' started to emerge as a term that often replaced 'Dance-Theatre' and 'Modern Mime', although the practice still existed in the margins of British theatre practice. In the 1990s I also spent a period of time working in live television, continued training as a performer, and worked as an assistant teacher in African American Rhythm Tap. This included a considerable amount of improvisation and 'jamming' with percussionists.

Although I studied at Goldsmiths later in the 1990s, I continued to undertake dance training as no consistent physicalised practice for actors was offered by the college at that time. The work I was producing whilst at Goldsmiths, and the subjects I wrote about for my dissertation (Ntozake Shange and interdisciplinary practice), continued to develop my practice in devised 'Physical Theatre' which at times freely drew on existing play texts. After graduating I was involved in various devised theatre projects before joining English National Opera's Baylis Programme (education, community and outreach team), which produced interdisciplinary performances/projects with a wide range of participant groups. Two years later, as part of a transition into

directing devised performance, I became an assistant director/choreographer to Ian Spink at Second Stride. At this time Spink had been working collaboratively with Caryl Churchill and Orlando Gough on various productions which integrated movement, dance, spoken word, song and music. I was very fortunate to work with, and learn from, Spink and Churchill as they collaborated and devised/choreographed with the company, as they were both very skilled at 'enabling' the performers we worked with (actors, dancers, singers and musicians). They were also very open about using a playful process of discovery and invention. The way in which Churchill worked with the company as a writer gave a very particular 'space' for physical performance to operate in a relational and equal exchange with (sung) words. She also worked with a particular type of feminist ethos and a commitment to the notion of collaboration. Interestingly, Second Stride encountered various problems with the Arts Council who were no longer sure how to categorise their work. They did not think that 'dance' described the later work of the company, but noted that it did not easily fit into the category of 'contemporary opera' either. Sadly the company lost their core Arts Council funding the following year.

I furthered developed my own directorial practice whilst training at Central School of Speech and Drama (1997-1998) where I was fortunate enough to be taught by Clive Barker, Emilyn Claid and Victoria Lee in mask work, all of whom drew on different forms of physical play in training and theatre-making. Whilst at Central I had also started to trace out genealogies of practice that related to my own earlier training and approach (i.e. both the 'Modern Mime' and 'Dance-Theatre' strands), and, as I started to explore the 'messiness' of these interconnections, I started to investigate Suzanne Bing's work in more detail. I was also introduced to the work of Michael Chekhov and from this point I started to experiment with his techniques, working from *On The Technique of Acting* (1991), and was blending them with my existing practice.

After graduating from Central I worked as a director on a number of devised productions which I reluctantly described as 'Physical Theatre'. I was

fusing my training and experience in 'dance-theatre' and 'physical theatre' with my early experiments with Chekhov Technique. I was using various forms of play, often in relation to existing texts/play texts, and for one show I collaborated with a playwright in a lengthy devised process.<sup>2</sup> Categorisation of the work remained problematic; at times I was asked to present work as a 'choreographer', other times invited to work as a 'movement director', but was not happy with either title. However, at the same time, the way that I used playful methods to work in collaboration with actors on material did not easily correlate to the practices that were used by other emerging theatre directors at the time. For example, the Young Directors Forum at the Young Vic offered sessions on particular approaches to 'blocking actors' movement' around this time that was the antithesis to my own practice. Following a year's work on a large-scale devised production at the Riverside Studios the Arts Council had an internal debate about whether the work should be toured on the Physical Theatre circuit or the Live Art circuit and the show itself was billed as 'Total Theatre'. Interestingly one of the Arts Council reports described the work as 'beautifully choreographed', drawing on dance terminology. By this time I was unhappy with the term 'Physical Theatre', feeling it was too generalised and no longer related specifically to the use of embodied imagination in relation to transformation and the use of play.

In addition to directing during this period I was also working as a freelance lecturer and trainer of undergraduate and postgraduate actors and directors for drama schools and Universities. I also continued to train with various practitioners in dance, physical theatre, Butoh and other forms. I was particularly influenced by training with John Wright because of the way in which he enables play and because he too was blending the French tradition gained through his training with Lecoq with aspects of Chekhov Technique and his own practices.

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<sup>2</sup> Predictably I encountered various problems obtaining the rights to certain play texts due to the fact that I was 'playing' liberally with the material and this consequently led to extensive 'adaptation'.

In 2004 I joined the department of Theatre and Performance at Goldsmiths as a permanent member of staff where I subsequently re-designed, managed and taught on the major practical and production-based courses on the undergraduate degree. I also contributed to the MA in Applied Theatre. Nine months after joining Goldsmiths I trained with Graham Dixon in Chekhov Technique and this was a major turning point in my practice. From this time onwards I started to explore and experiment with these techniques very specifically in my practice. I was, by then, also researching and writing about, what I was then terming the play practices of Bing/Copeau/Lecoq along with those developed by Chekhov. I also started to explore the different forms of play that Joan Littlewood used as I had been introduced to this work by Barker at Central. I was specifically interested in the way in which Bing, Chekhov and Littlewood had often been working from the margins of theatre practice, or in seemingly marginal roles, and had been developing forms of play that were not being adequately addressed under the dominant discourse centring on Lecoq's notion of *Le Jeu*. I used this approach in relation to teaching and enabling actors, directors and dramaturges on all the practice-based courses, but I also developed a specialist second year option in Play which allowed me to focus on, and experiment with, this work in greater detail. This has meant that while writing this thesis I have been concurrently experimenting with, and interrogating, the forms of actor training and the uses of play developed by Bing, Chekhov and their collaborators.

Scott (1999) notes that the development of feminist 'Her-Stories' in tandem with social history 'conceptualized as historical phenomena family relationships, fertility and sexuality' (p.21). In the context of a feminist form of historiography it is therefore also noteworthy that whilst writing this thesis I, like Suzanne Bing, Margaret Naumburg, Marie-Hélène Dasté and Jessmin Howarth, have also negotiated fertility, pregnancy, childbirth and parenting (in my case as a gay woman) whilst also working as a practicing artist, teacher and researcher. Like these female practitioners working in the early years of the twentieth century, I too have been able to watch and engage with my child in various

forms of play, and have developed both my own play-enabling skills and research observations, from this dynamic relational exchange. Like these other women, I have got my 'hands dirty' with what is still often perceived to be a gendered, 'messy', and low status role of a playing mother. I also learnt a great deal about Montessori's pedagogic approach as my own daughter attended a nursery school based on these principles. Although I should clarify that I am not in support of the occasionally problematic 'valorization of motherhood' that Hart notes is a tendency of some French feminists (1996, p.114).

This relationship between my practice and theoretical analysis has meant that critical questions that have arisen have made me change and re-focus my practice, while at the same time practical discoveries and problems in the studio have led me to reconsider my critical analysis and arguments. Although I have explained the close connection between my practical work and this thesis, i.e. the reason for the inclusion of Bing and Chekhov as the case study artists, Scott argues we must also 'acknowledge and take responsibility for the exclusions in one's own project' (1999, p.7). She argues: 'Such a reflexive, self-critical approach makes apparent the particularistic status of any historical knowledge and the historian's active role as producer of knowledge. It undermines claims for authority based on totalizing explanations, essentialized categories for analysis [...] or synthetic narratives that assume an inherent unity for the past' (ibid). The use of a Foucauldian genealogy which is developed in the Introduction helps to avoid the desire for a totalizing analysis. However, there are arguably other actor-trainers who use play that could have been considered in this project but sadly space prevented a larger number of case studies. The work of Joan Littlewood would be particularly significant in this respect in terms of not just areas of convergence but because her use of play is also very different to that developed by Bing and Chekhov, and I would hope to be able to address her practice in future studies.

This study analyses practices developed early in the twentieth century and the issues relating to gender, power and ownership that a Foucauldian

genealogy and a feminist form of historiography raise about actor training that leads to collaborative and devised theatre-making. However, many of these issues remain pertinent to numerous artists/pedagogues working in the UK today, particularly women. This is perhaps not surprising as Scott argues, 'history's representations of the past help construct gender for the present' (1999, p.2). Scott's argument that we need to pay special attention to how 'hierarchies such as those of gender are constructed and legitimized' (p.4) applies not only to the historical case studies addressed in this thesis but also to the current practices in play-based actor training and devised theatre making in the UK and the relationship between the two.

Scott also argues that to 'find gender in history' it is not enough to do a literal reading of the discipline but that 'a different kind of exegesis is required' which 'points to the importance of textuality, to the ways arguments are structured and presented as well as to what is literally said' (1999, p.7). In the context of this study, this demands that I do not just consider 'what is said', but consider the ways in which the training is 'structured and presented' and indeed experienced. When Chekhov does 'speak' in his publications we also need to consider this issue of how he has chosen to present and write about his techniques in this respect, in particular his decision to describe many of his techniques very specifically as forms of play and games. Similarly, Bing's decision not to 'speak' through sole authored texts should not necessarily be seen as a decision to write herself out of history and this does not lessen her significance. Scott makes the important observation that '[...] those absent from official accounts partook nonetheless in the making of history: those who are silent speak eloquently about the meanings of power and the uses of political authority' (p.24). Rather Bing's embodied and interpersonal exchanges of training and practice need to be viewed as of equal importance and value to the written publications of Copeau, despite being much harder to pinpoint, 'own' in economic or hierarchical terms, and 'control' in the realm of actor training and the theatre 'economy'. Indeed, much of the analysis in this thesis considers



how the forms of embodied play work themselves and is not restricted to 'what is literally said', as this cannot always be transmitted in words.

Bing, Naumburg, Dasté, and Howarth along with Chekhov's female collaborators Georgette Boner, Deirdre Du Prey and Beatrice Straight, were also contributing to a network of changes and challenges in the early part of the twentieth century. Whilst these women did not overtly address feminist issues or themes in their work, and were not politically active in the name of feminism, the quiet radicalism that they contributed to in the development of embodied play and play-enabling was highly significant none the less. In Rowbotham's recent publication (2011) on women who 'invented' the twentieth century she argues '[s]ome mystics were searching for inner change, while others wanted to concentrate on external reforms' (p.3) and whilst not claiming that these women were 'mystics', their practice did arguably bring about a fundamental 'inner' change by empowering actors through play, which eventually led to considerable changes in ways of making theatre, i.e. external processes and vice versa. The very fact that they were involved in these different strands of professional actor training as bourgeois women at that time is of interest. Rowbotham notes that women who were accessing employment at this time 'were pulling women outwards' (p.2). She also notes the many different ways in which women were changing the twentieth century:

The women who tried to alter everyday life and culture along with their own destinies were both dreamers and adventurers, for they explored with only the sketchiest of maps and they headed towards the unknown, courageously interrogating assumed behaviour in personal relationships and in society. They challenged gender divisions, sexual attitudes, family arrangements, ways of doing housework and mothering, existing forms of consumption and paid working conditions. They proposed new approaches to the body [...] En route they criticised existing methods of education, delineated new areas of knowledge and subverted existing assumptions about culture.

(Rowbotham 2011, p.3)

Whilst the women addressed did not necessarily make these challenges in an overtly political way, or in all the areas noted by Rowbotham, their work as theatre practitioners and pedagogues, and their personal lives, contributed to what Foucault might identify as the beginnings of 'entscheidung' which designates a complex point of emergence or moment of arising which he characterises as the 'eruption' of forces and the 'the leap from the wings to the centre stage' (1977A, pp. 149-150).

As the thesis demonstrates, the specifically embodied form of play used in actor training and theatre making developed by Bing, Chekhov and their collaborators did develop new approaches to working with (and from) the actors' bodies (and embodied imagination) and Chapter 4 argues the work of Maria Montessori, Naumburg and Bing did not only critique existing forms of education but developed significant alternatives that were to feature in a range of pedagogic, artistic and therapeutic contexts throughout the twentieth century.

Bing was never to hold any economic power in the Vieux Colombier Company or School, or in Les Copiaus or Compagnie des Quinze, nor was she ever given any job titles that reflected the significance of her work, and this can certainly be seen as a problematic factor in the history of the French network of practitioners. Donahue notes that in 1949 Copeau provided the funds for Bing to live in a retirement home for her last years (2008, p.125); so she never gained economic freedom in this respect during her lifetime. In contrast, it is interesting to note that Chekhov was actually often dependent on the economic support of his close female collaborators. Boner had funded their work in Paris and then later Chekhov was supported by Straight and Du Prey through their connection with Dartington Hall. The fact that Chekhov's three closest female colleagues had a level of financial control, or influence, at various points in his career possibly helped to balance their relationships and this may have supported their more collaborative relationship. A Materialist Feminist perspective would arguably claim this type of equality would have been significant. Bing and Chekhov's economic positions are in contrast to those of

Stanislavski, Copeau and Saint-Denis, as whilst these three men had all also encountered financial difficulties in relation to funding their work at various points in their careers, they had all held the ultimate decision-making power in relation to the economics of the projects they were involved with. Bing's achievements as a women working at that time, without economic leverage, are all the more impressive in this respect.

This thesis presents the argument that the forms of play that Bing, Chekhov, and their collaborators, used in actor training and theatre-making are quietly radical and that they required quite a specific relationship with their students/actors/collaborators and a particular form of what is termed play-enabling. This radicalism applies not only to training and theatre-making but also to the ways of working with theatrical texts, working relationships within theatre companies, roles and status. As Scott notes men have used 'masculinity' in various ways that relates to power, control and status (1999, p.24), and this arguably also applies to actor training and styles of teaching, along with their representations in theatre histories, in addition to the broader socio-political contexts that Scott identifies.

Clarke (2009) has presented a critique of the use of a particular type of masculinity, 'Paternal Master-Tyrants', in actor training genealogies and this can certainly be seen to apply to the practice of Copeau. She has also helpfully discussed the work of male practitioners who resist a use of this type of masculinity. As discussed in chapter 3, Chekhov's forms of embodied play, and his style of play-enabling, is not afraid of being more 'feminine' despite the fact that he is a man. A loose, non essentialist, borrowing of Cixous' term of the 'feminine writing' (*écriture féminine*, 1975) may be helpful to this analysis and feminist form of historiography. Cixous is useful here as Segarra notes that *écriture féminine* has often been described 'as "writing the body", meaning [it] does not rely mainly on rationality but incorporates the body's rhythms, humors, and moods' (Segarra 2010, p.12), although she notes Derrida's recognition that *écriture féminine* is not totally automatic writing but that the writer stays

‘watchful’. This notion of the ‘feminine’ being based in the body and not being dominated by reason, which is seen as phallocentric and therefore masculine, works well with these forms of actor training and very specifically their uses of play.

Cixous also worked collaboratively in the theatre with Ariane Mnouchkine who was trained by Lecoq and, as Segarra argues, she recognises that theatre ‘is not only based on writing, and [...] stresses that her plays are the fruit of special encounters and collaborative work, especially those staged by Ariane Mnouchkine’s Théâtre du Soleil’ (ibid, p.14).<sup>3</sup> What is helpful is that Cixous asserts that some writing “inscribes femininity” whether it is written by a man or a woman and she notes that Jean Genet is one of the men ‘who aren’t afraid of femininity’ (2010, p.38). In the case of Bing and Chekhov’s studio-based work the practice is not ‘writing’, but an application of the ‘feminine’ is a helpful tool in the analysis of their forms of embodied play and also Chekhov’s play-enabling style.

The methodology drawing on both Foucault’s notion of genealogy and Feminist forms of historiography are developed in Chapter 1. My ‘presence’ as genealogist and feminist practitioner is, as Foucault and Scott would argue, woven into the fabric of this thesis. The conclusion will return to issues the genealogy explores in relation to the analysis of historical practice but will also consider what this might mean to contemporary practitioners working within Embodied Theatre today.

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<sup>3</sup> It is also interesting to note that Cixous also uses animals and legendary beasts in her writing, along with fairytales, as both Bing and Chekhov do in their different forms of embodied play as discussed in chapters 4 and 5 ( see Segarra 2010, p.10).

# Introduction

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## 1. Introduction

This thesis critically examines the Embodied Theatre practices of Suzanne Bing (1885-1967) and Michael Chekhov (1891-1955) that utilise forms of play as a constituent part of their actor training processes. The study presents a genealogy, tracing and reviewing accounts of past practices, in order to re-configure the contributions of Bing and Chekhov in historical terms and to illuminate the related strands of Embodied Theatre practice in Britain today. This study will reconsider the work of Bing and her various collaborators between 1913 and 1935 and Chekhov's practice from 1912 until his death in 1955. Whilst critiquing the category of Physical Theatres,<sup>1</sup> the thesis develops original insights into the use of play in the methods of actor training including analysis and school/studio based theatre-making, developed by Bing and Chekhov and their close collaborators, whose lineages of practice are frequently situated under this umbrella term.<sup>2</sup> The study will also seek to expand the generally accepted notion of 'play' in relation to what is often termed physical theatre training and theatre-making processes and interrogate a number of the assumed relationships between radical process and final production aesthetic, providing new critical scholarship in this area.

This study situates Bing and Chekhov's work within a web of tangled taxonomies of physicalised performance and an analysis of these terms will help in the identification, and analysis, of their respective practices in both a historical and contemporary context. Chekhov's practice is situated in a curious position within this wider network of practices and in effect his method connects various strands of twentieth century performance practices which are often presented as being diametrically opposite and mutually exclusive. Bing's

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<sup>1</sup> I am using Murray and Keefe's plural of this term (2007).

<sup>2</sup> The appendix of Chekhov's *To The Actor* (2002) is included in Keefe and Murray's publication (2007).

placement in this mapping is also complex in large part due to either inadequate analysis of her own practice, or absence, in many of the historical studies. As will be discussed, her work has directly fed into many of the differently identified forms of practice in this web, but her work is generally viewed through the prism of the mythic history of her collaborator Jacques Copeau (1879-1949). Importantly, this study is also addressing the work of practitioners who came from different theatre lineages, working for the most part in different parts of the world, and through an act of historical coincidence rather than direct exchange, both developed techniques which centralise forms of embodied play.

The last four decades have witnessed a sharp increase in the making and programming of Physical Theatres in Britain and whilst this term is frequently critiqued by both practitioners and academics working within the field, there is still a marked absence of detailed analysis of the modes of performance it is seen to represent in specific terms. In part, this analytic reticence is due to the broad and nebulous nature of the varied practices this term has come to encompass. Consequently the term itself, the different techniques and approaches the term is assumed to encompass, along with the supposed relationship between process and performance aesthetic, have still not been fully examined. Murray & Keefe's (2007) two related publications provide a much needed general mapping of the field of Physical Theatres whilst acknowledging the problem with the category. However, the very wide scope and nature of their publication does not allow for analysis of the practitioners' respective techniques in detail. The practices of Bing and Chekhov are significant in this discussion as contemporary artists working in this field in Britain are drawing on their methods in their processes of training and theatre-making. This study starts to address this gap in scholarship by reducing the focus to two strands of practice which, whilst being different in many respects, both utilise embodied play as a constituent part of their training and making processes. Due to this refined focus, and shared use of play, the thesis will argue how, and why, Phelim McDermott's suggested term, Embodied Theatre (2007), might better define the particular practices of Bing and Chekhov in this

respect and allow for a consideration of both the points of convergence and divergence between the two lineages.

A methodology which draws on Foucault's notion of genealogy (1977) and feminist forms of historiography (Scott, 1999) is developed later in the introduction to facilitate a re-configured analysis of existing materials written in English by, or about, the methods developed by Bing and Chekhov and their close collaborators. In line with Foucault's project, this genealogy does not seek to provide the notion of a single or pure 'origin' of technique but traces the areas of resistance and convergence between the techniques, processes and ideas of the case study practitioners in relation to their collaborators. As a result, the thesis intentionally considers the 'messy' and 'impure' way in which the practices were developed by the case study artists, i.e. through close collaboration and a cross-fertilisation of ideas. It critiques the way in which more traditional accounts of actor training and theatre historiographies have either allocated, or maintained, specific power relations and notions of individual ownership of these strands of practice based around the idea of master-teachers (i.e. Stanislavsky and Copeau). Related to this is the way in which the study presents a feminist alternative to the still dominant (his)story of the three companies with which Bing was associated; Vieux Colombier Company (1913-1924) and school (1913-1925) (VC); Les Copiaus company and school (1925-1929) (LC); and Compagnie des Quinze (1929-1935) and their training and theatre-making practices (CQ). Bing was unique in terms of her embodied experience of working in all three companies and schools/training programmes. Concurrently, the study analyses Chekhov's work in relation to other physicalised performance practices, and in particular a notion of play, in order to move the focus away from the, still dominant, tendency to analyse the work primarily as an extension of Stanislavsky's practice. In addition to this, Flusser's (2003) notion of expellees and nomads is also used to consider the social, personal and artistic experiences, positioning and methodological development of the practices developed by Bing and Chekhov.

Whilst Alison Hodge notes that at the start of the twentieth century there was 'an explosion of interest in the power and potential of actor training in the West' (2000, p.1) frequently this growth of actor training in the West was linked to the emergence of the role of the director (Hodge 2000, Whitworth 2002), many of whom developed their own systems of training. However, Bing and Chekhov were primarily actors and pedagogues, rather than being prominent twentieth directors or playwrights, which renders canonical approaches to theatrical productions, or theatre writing (i.e. play writing), as a way of assessing their worth and significant as redundant. Therefore this project will provide an alternative historiography that allows for an equal consideration of use of embodied play in actor training process and how this was inextricably connected to forms of analysis and processes of theatre-making created through extended play in the schools and studios, that was ultimately to lead to early forms of devised theatre-making in a professional context. This approach also allows for a consideration of aspects of their methods of play which underpin their work but are not always directly visible in simplistic terms in the final performance or aesthetic. The significance of performer training systems, experimentation, and rehearsal process is not unique only to physicalised performance, but is pivotal to much theatre practice. In this respect it will also help to expand the current feminist historiographies of theatre practice which do not generally consider the processes of actor training. Related to this is the need for an analysis of the specific pedagogic methods Bing and Chekhov developed to enable actor-centred embodied play and how this can be considered in relation to dominant ideas about gender in the early twentieth century. This will be analysed in relation to how it represented certain challenges to dominant ideas about the roles and power relations between directors-actors/teachers-students and a director's control of the theatre-making process.

Chapters 2-5 develop an expanded notion of embodied play. Whilst Jacques Lecoq's (1921-1999) notion of 'Le Jeu' as a principle of play in performance and training is now widely recognised within the larger field of



Physical Theatres, it is often only related to his own approach, the work of his collaborators and former students, or traced back to the earlier work of Copeau with his 'notion of play as first principle of the dramatic imagination' (Gordon 2006, p.214), and intermittently and/or only partially to the work of Bing. In this context, the work of Chekhov, whilst frequently acknowledged as highly playful, game-like and dependent on improvisation, is marginalised or overlooked in this existing discourse of play. Subsequently what Chekhov's practice may contribute to this area of practice and scholarship, or how it may challenge or expand certain understandings of play, has not been adequately considered and this research extends this discourse. In addition this study develops a re-evaluation of the French tradition of play to reveal the contribution that Bing made through her work with the three companies, and the related training programmes, which has largely been hidden under the histories and constructed identities of Copeau, Michel Saint-Denis (1897-1971) and more recently the work of Lecoq. The skills and styles of what I am terming play-enabling that both Chekhov and Bing developed, which have only been tangentially considered in existing literature, will be analysed and brought into the foreground. Consequently, this study draws on various methodologies of play developed by Vygotsky (1966), Huizinga (1955), Caillois (2001), Winnicott (1991), Turner (1982) and Sutton-Smith (2003) along with writings by play therapists, such as Cattanach (1992). From these it derives a critical framework to re-evaluate these practices. The important acts of cross-fertilisation, not only with various other artists, but also progressive pedagogues of the early twentieth century will be addressed thereby including the pedagogic styles of play-enabling rather than purely focussing on the techniques/'exercises' in isolation. This will include the practices of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, Maria Montessori, Margaret Naumburg, Rudolf Steiner and the Dartington Hall project. A consideration of the differences and moments of convergence between these two strands of embodied play practice will also develop the initial discussions about the moments of correlation between these two lineages that Frost & Yarrow have touched on in their revised publication (2007).

Chapter 5 considers the way in which forms of embodied play were also extended through the use of various frames and how these processes were used to create small-scale performances in the school/studio context. It addresses how these processes of extending the use of their embodied play methods ultimately prepared the actors for, and led to, early examples of devising processes for professional productions. It also addresses the way in which embodied play can potentially disrupt the traditional dominance of the play-text, creating space for embodied experience and signification. Consequently these practices challenged the hierarchy of theatrical roles through a specific type of empowerment of the actor. By considering how the development of extended play in actor training ultimately led to early devising practices a fuller consideration of Bing and Chekhov's work is presented. Questions about the ethics of play, along with forms of ownership and control of this practice, are also discussed. A critique of the way in which certain devising histories (Oddey 1994, Heddon & Milling 2006, Govan et al 2007 and Mermikides et al 2010) either circumvent, or only partially consider these early forms of embodied play due to the domination of Copeau's position in the context of the French lineage, and the disregard of the radical nature of Chekhov's practice, will also be presented.

The notion of overt and covert use of Chekhov's radical technique is investigated, focussing on how the play processes can retain radicalism even if applied to more traditional text-based theatre production. This argument will centralise the importance of process, rather than an overly dominant consideration of the final production aesthetic, to better acknowledge this form of quiet radicalism and the potentiality of embodied play in developing forms of theatre of the future. The transformation of these two strands of embodied play will also be considered in relation to contemporary practice in the conclusion.

## 2. Case Studies

A short biographical trace for each case study will help to contextualise the analysis presented in the following chapters and situates their work in relation to their close collaborations with various other theatre artists and pedagogues.

### 2.1 Copeau's Bing.... Or Bing's Copeau?

Suzanne Bing was born in 1885 in Paris to a bourgeois French-Jewish family. In 1905 she trained for two years at the Paris Conservatoire de Musique et de Declamation before living in Paris and Berlin with her husband, Edgard Varèse, where they struggled to earn a living as artists (see Donahue 2008). In 1910 they had a daughter, Claude, but divorced shortly afterwards. In 1913 Copeau founded the VC and held auditions in Charles Dullin's apartment where he met and hired Bing as a founding actor of the company. Later that year Bing worked with the company in Limon, often outdoors, working on their initial productions and developing their first experiments in actor training. In the first season of the VC (1913) Bing played a number of lead roles including Viola in an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and during this period she and Copeau started a relationship. Bing continued to work closely with Copeau throughout the First World War, when the VC was closed, and was to significantly develop their early interests in play. In 1915, she and Copeau worked with a group of children in Paris experimenting with various teaching approaches and related forms of creative and embodied play. The following year Bing travelled to Switzerland with Copeau to visit the Jaques-Dalcroze school and observe both the Jaques-Dalcroze Technique and his pedagogic approach in action. Both the technique and pedagogic concepts were to become influential on their early methods of actor training. Together Copeau and Bing further developed the ideas for a theatre school and translated Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. In 1917 Bing gave birth to their son, Bernard Bing.

Bing joined the VC for their two seasons in New York (1917-1919) as an actor. Despite the many difficulties that the company faced in America, and their not entirely successful attempts at actor training, this was a very fertile period of experimentation in relation to Bing and her collaborator's development of play and this will be addressed in detail in Chapter 4. In the spring of 1918 she spent time at Margaret Naumburg's children's school in New York and undertook early mask making experiments with Copeau's daughter Marie-Hélène Dasté, nee Copeau (1902-1994) (hereafter Dasté). She also started to further develop their work with animal play and also took part in, and carefully observed, Jessmin Howarth's Jaques-Dalcroze technique classes for the actors of the VC. In 1919 the VC returned to Paris and in 1920 the theatre re-opened with Bing and Copeau's translation/adaptation of *The Winter's Tale* and they were finally able to establish a formal school for actors. Bing single-handedly taught the first small cohort in 1920. In the following year the school expanded to teach various 'Divisions' including an 'Apprentice' class (14-18 years) who were exposed to the most radical training practices. Jules Romains was made the 'Director', however as the thesis will demonstrate, Bing was to remain the central pedagogue at the VC and LC. Bing was extending the methods of embodied play that they were teaching the 'Apprentice' actors and mentored the students in the development of student-led small scale performances made through these extended processes. She also directed a number of seminal school performances. In marked contrast, Copeau spent very little time working at the Paris school, and rarely embodied the developing methods of embodied play. In 1924 Copeau disbanded the VC theatre company and Copeau, Bing and a small number of collaborators and family members moved from Paris to Burgundy to continue with the work of the school and to develop their ideas for a New Comedy, a contemporary form of masked commedia dell'arte. Her methods and pedagogy was also to be heavily used by the LC and CQ which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Following the move to Burgundy in 1924 Bing continued to develop her methods of actor training and also returned to acting. As a training and research company, the re-configured VC started to perform shows outdoors in rural Burgundy, often drawing on a use of extended embodied play to create their work. During this period Copeau had an intermittent and complex relationship with the company (see Kurtz 1999, p.123) and it is evident that Bing's involvement during this time was pivotal. In 1925 the group of artists moved to Pernand-Vergelles, but in the same year abandon the school due to lack of funds. Later that year Bing, the students and a couple of the actors from the VC company, become known as LC and gave their first performance in May. The training started again and remained under Bing's supervision with Copeau often away or not directly involved in their work. In 1929 the company experienced a major split and Bing, some of the other actors and a number of students, went to Paris independently from Copeau to establish CQ under Saint-Denis' direction. Bing brought with her a well developed play method for both training and theatre-making and was also one of the most experienced actors in the company. In January 1931 CQ presented their first production, *Noé*, written by Andre Obey who had become the 'company poet'. The company's first successful season was followed by a second (1932-33) at the Atelier and also two tours of England before disbanding in 1935. Bing then collaborated with Copeau again on the translation of Shakespearean tragedies (published 1939) and comedies (published after Copeau's death in 1952). She did not run an actor training school again in her lifetime nor continue to make theatre through an application of embodied and extended play. However, she adapted two other Japanese Nō plays which Dasté and Jean Dasté directed (1947, 1951) which were to prove to be highly significant on a number of levels. After this time Bing acted in various French films, taught elocution and gave readings to students at the Sorbonne; she died in 1967.

Bing did not publish material on her practice as an individual author during her lifetime, but a limited number of writings by her, and reflections or comments on her work by other company members, have been included in the

VC publications. There are other records by Bing on her practice that are available in the VC archive in Paris. As I do not read French, and had no funds for translation services, I have been restricted to using materials from the books and the archives which have been translated into English for this research project. However, this thesis presents the argument that these materials should be examined, translated and published specifically in relation to Bing's practice in order to better represent the work of the VC, LC and CQ in historical terms and, in particular, to illuminate the way in which she used play in actor training and processes of theatre-making.

## **2.2 Kaleidoscopic Chekhov**

Michael Chekhov was born in 1891 in St Petersburg to a Russian bourgeois family, Jewish by ancestry, and started experimenting with performance in childhood. In 1907 he attended the Suvorin Theatre School and subsequently worked with the Maly Theatre prior to meeting Stanislavsky and joining the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) in 1912. Chekhov worked with Stanislavsky for a number of years, and was one of the most acclaimed actors of the company, but, as Mel Gordon (1985) has pointed out, from the start there were considerable differences between the two men's approaches. By 1913, in *The Wreck of the Good Hope*, Chekhov was already claiming to 'move beyond' the text to find the character and the author in his imaginative acting, empowering himself as an artist (Gordon 1987, p.119). Whilst Chekhov borrowed heavily from Konstantin Stanislavsky, he was arguably equally influenced by two other teachers and collaborators at the MAT and its studios, Leopold Sulerzhitsky and Evgeni Vakhtangov. Over the next few years in Russia, Chekhov was to suffer from various personal, artistic and spiritual problems, and, by 1918, was experiencing what he later defined as a period of 'nervous tension' (2005, p.71). During this period he was unable to perform and the establishment of the first Chekhov Studio 1918-1922 was a practical way to generate an income. However, this was a positive experience; it enabled him to establish some of the key areas of his technique and of his overall pedagogical

approach and he started to work with non-theatrical texts. Crucially this early work was already centred on the actor's embodied imagination and Chekhov was experimenting with ideas about transformative (and non self-based) character development, the uses of energy, meditation and images (see Gordon 1987). It was also during this period that Chekhov first started to develop productions based on fairytales and literary adaptations with his students, although Gordon notes that these performances in Russia had only interested 'a limited audience' (ibid, p.128). His recovery from this crisis was, in part, facilitated by the discovery of Rudolf Steiner's Spiritual Science, Anthroposophy, which helped him to re-consider in spiritual terms his experiences and understandings of his creative-imaginative self.

Following this, Chekhov had another successful period as an actor in Russia (1921-1927) and, after the death of Vakhtangov, he became the Artistic Director of the MAT First Studio in 1922, which was to become the Second Moscow Art Academic Theatre (MAAT2) in 1924. His work at MAAT2 enabled Chekhov to teach his own methods, not just those of Stanislavsky. By this time, he had undertaken more serious research into Anthroposophy and had seen performances utilising Steiner's Eurhythmy which he consequently drew on to develop more radical experiments. The Russian political regime at the time increasingly sought to repress the development of his experimental techniques because of his use of aspects of Anthroposophy in his work (Chekhov 2005, p.35). Gordon explains that he was '[d]enounced as an "idealist" and mystic in 1927, Alexi Diky and sixteen performers left [...] [and] foremost Moscow newspapers branded Chekhov as "a sick artist"; his productions "alien and reactionary"' (1985, p.15). In 1928, Chekhov and his second wife managed to secure passports to leave Russia after being warned of his imminent arrest.

Following his departure from Russia, Chekhov was to live and work in Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Paris, Latvia, Lithuania, USA and England before settling in the USA. He was often forced to move between countries to avoid fascist coups, civil war and, finally, the Second World War. Obviously this

geographical oscillation resulted in Chekhov working with artists from various different cultures, in both rural and urban centres, encountering very different ideas about actor training and rehearsal techniques, and often working in languages that he did not speak on arrival (i.e. German and English). After a period of time working as an actor for Max Reinhardt in Berlin, he followed in Vakhtangov's footsteps by working as a director for the Habima on their production of *Twelfth Night* (Berlin 1930, London 1931). Whilst in Germany he also established a 'home studio' which included some former actors of the MAAT and MAAT 2 in addition to young apprentice actors, including George Shdanoff (1905-1988) who was to assist Chekhov in his later work in Britain and in the USA. Following this period in Germany Chekhov moved to Paris in his pursuit to develop what he hoped would be an 'ideal theatre'. This time in Paris was 'unsuccessful' and disappointing for Chekhov on a number of levels but he undertook some daring experiments with a new collaborator Georgette Boner (a former student of Reinhardt) whom he met in May 1931. With money from Boner they established the Theatre of Chekhov, Boner & Co and they worked on an adaptation of one of Tolstoy's fairytales *The Castle Awakens* which was performed later that year. The public reception of this project was generally negative and was closed after very few performances.

From Paris Chekhov moved to Riga in 1933 and worked as an actor, teacher and director in Latvia and Lithuania for the Latvian State Theatre and the Russian Drama Theatre. However, Chekhov occupied a precarious position as a Russian émigré and at this time he also suffered from a heart attack which forced him to stop acting for a second period of time in his life. He began writing about his technique, with editorial support from Boner whilst recovering. The fascist take over of Latvia eventually led Chekhov to leave the country and he briefly returned to Paris to organise a company of Russian actors called the Moscow Arts Players who toured the USA (1934-1935). Black notes that Boner contacted Beatrice Straight (1914-2001) and Deirdre Hurst du Prey (1906-2007), who were looking for a director of the theatre school at Dartington Hall, and suggested that they see Chekhov (1987, p.27). They were impressed with



Chekhov and he was duly invited to establish the Chekhov Studio (CS) at Dartington Hall in England, a community that housed various experimental arts, crafts and agricultural projects that had been founded in 1925 by Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst (Straight's mother and step-father). Chekhov arrived and started work in 1935 and the studio ran between 1936 and 1938. Chekhov was joined at the CS by Straight and du Prey who became, and remained, seminal collaborators until his death. Chekhov designed a full three year training programme, although the studio only ran for two years at Dartington Hall. Chekhov developed his methods and teaching practice, in particular in relation to what I argue was a use of extended play, whilst he was working in this utopian progressive pedagogical environment. Once again, Chekhov was to move due to impending war, this time the growing fear that Britain was to go to war with Germany. The studio relocated to Ridgefield Connecticut, in the USA in 1939.

Black notes that on this move Chekhov 'simplified his original [training] programme' and that 'the aims stated for the Ridgefield Studio were geared to attract and appeal to American actors. These aims were made more systematic and tangible than those at Dartington Hall' (1987, p.34). Chekhov and his collaborators also needed to develop a Broadway and touring shows in order to generate income (ibid, p.35). In 1940 they established the Chekhov Theatre Players, a touring theatre company consisting of students from the CS at Dartington. Chekhov and Shdanoff, his collaborator and former student from the 'home studio', presented five productions for his company including *The Possessed* based on Dostoyevsky's novel. In 1941 Chekhov opened an additional studio in New York. Once again, war was to impact on Chekhov's work and at the end of 1942 most of his actors and students were called up for military service. He subsequently closed the Studio and moved to Hollywood in 1943 where he was to act in various films and finally settle, but never taught in a studio context again. Interestingly, Chekhov started to teach professional actors, mostly on a part-time basis, who had been trained in diverse acting methodologies. Many of these actors worked in commercial theatre and film

and subsequently his methods were to start to influence a generation of film actors, directors and teachers in the USA and Gordon argues that '[i]ndirectly, Chekhov provided the strongest intellectual counterweight to Strasberg's much criticised Method' (1985 p.17). In 1946 he re-staged *The Government Inspector* for the Lab Theatre and this was the last production he directed. After a second heart attack in 1954 he gave up acting but continued to teach and lecture until his death in 1955.

### **3. Genealogy as Methodology and New Forms of Feminist Historiography**

The map of taxonomies relating to this wider field of physicalised performance will be outlined in Chapter 1. It demonstrates the way in which practices intersect and cross-fertilise countering notions of 'purity' of systems of actor training and theatre-making. It also illustrates how both Bing and Chekhov's practice was built on collaboration with other practitioners and pedagogues. Whilst this study seeks to free Bing and Chekhov from being viewed merely as extensions of Copeau or Stanislavsky's practice retrospectively, and to develop the scholarship on Bing who is largely absent from traditional actor training histories, the aim is not to simply re-allocate 'ownership' from the dominant artists to marginalised practitioners. Rather it seeks to view their work as creative hybrid forms developed through collaboration rather than continuing the dominant master-director (teacher) evaluative structures in relation to histories of actor training. Both artists developed their practices and ideas in a composite manner over many years. Practices were imaginatively embodied by Bing and Chekhov and were developed and transformed through physical and creative exchanges with collaborators. They also transmitted these forms of embodied play through the practical, embodied, teaching of their students. In effect their methodologies developed in a hotchpotch manner, rather than through a rigid singular system which remained unchanged over time. However, whilst we can trace various different strands of current practice back to the work of Bing and Chekhov, and even when it is relatively easy to trace the connections between certain

generations of practitioners and identify similar methods used by them (e.g. the use of mask by Bing, Copeau, Dasté, Jean Dasté, Decroux, Lecoq), the eventual methods, aesthetics and related theories developed by the younger generations are different and have been fused with other influences, projects and agendas. The publication of Chekhov's books and lectures also diversified this web of practices in a fascinating manner as artists have used his methods without necessarily receiving any embodied training, but rather discovering and using the techniques provided in his flexible 'handbook' in their own way.

The central aim of this thesis is to consider Bing and Chekhov's use of specifically imaginatively-embodied forms of play and provide an analysis of these practices. Therefore the critical frame developed needs to address the embodied nature of this practice and consider how this relates to the practitioners' ideas about body-mind connections, consciousness and creativity. It seeks to analyse both the points of convergence, and the moments of radical divergence, between these two strands of practice. A Foucauldian notion of a genealogy and feminist historical strategies (notwithstanding some of the tensions that exist between these two discourses) are developed in order to construct a flexible and feminist form of historiography. Lastly, various critical tools are introduced in Chapter 2 to help consider the way in which the forms of embodied play operate and this draws on various methodologies of play.

#### **4. Foucault's Notion of Genealogy**

In the light of these central research aims this methodology will develop a framework that celebrates these complex and non-linear developments without seeking to reduce them to something more controllable, linear and orderly. This notion of exploring the more marginalised practices (and artists), and intentionally looking at the diversity and cross-fertilisation that is at heart of the development of these embodied acting practices, is clearly in opposition to conventional historical studies which aim to produce a totalising account which generally require the identification of 'pure' or 'singular' origins or essences (i.e.

Copeau or Stanislavsky as the singular point of origin). Michel Foucault (1977A), following Nietzsche, provides a useful critique of the way in which conventional history 'reintroduces (and always assumes) a suprahistorical perspective: a history whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself [...] a completed development' (ibid, p.152). Foucault argues that the pursuit of 'origin' in a historiography becomes an 'attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities' which, he argues 'assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession' (ibid, p.142). This notion of immobility can be seen as the antithesis of Chekhov's technique in that he actively encourages students to use whichever aspects of his approach that work for them as creative individuals rather than following his methods in a rigid or formulaic manner. Similarly Bing and Copeau did not wish to present their methods of actor training in the form of a written guide, but rather felt that it needed to be understood as an 'experience'. To some extent both Chekhov and Bing's pedagogic and artistic approaches left spaces open for students to change and develop their techniques over time. Indeed, as Foucault explains, even if we are to try to search for an 'origin' or an 'essence', one would invariably find something far more complex and less tidy, including the emergence by chance (ibid). The thesis addresses the way in which both Bing and Chekhov's approaches were indeed drawing on different influences (alien forms) and embodied exchanges with other people (artists, audiences, other pedagogues).

Indeed a genealogical study is arguably more appropriate for an analysis of highly physicalised practice in general. Historical materials show that there has always been highly physicalised practice as a constituent part of the performances of everyday life (ritual, religious and folk practices) in a wider anthropological sense (see Richard Schechner 1977, Victor Turner 1982) and as part of formalised Western theatre practice. Therefore this is not a 'new' or 'pure' area of performance practice. We can trace various strands back to different eras and different socio-cultural systems and frequently early physicalised performance practices were presented in non-theatre spaces such

as market places and fairs. At times physicalised performance has been accepted by, and absorbed into, mainstream theatre practice, on other occasions it has been suppressed and controlled only to re-emerge with force in different ways at different times. Importantly, Bing and Chekhov (along with many of their close collaborators) were to be influenced by forms such as Commedia dell'arte, mask work, clowning and street performance. In actuality, the development of this web of physicalised performance techniques and aesthetics has always operated in a state of flux and could never lay claim to being a pure form. Indeed, as Simon McBurney argues 'I think the pleasure of theatre is impurity, it's the magpie quality of people stealing from everyone else' (McBurney in Tushingham 1994, p.24). In contrast to a traditional history, Foucault's arguments for the use of genealogy as a form of historiography enables recognition of these 'magpie' borrowings and areas of co-existence and flux. A genealogy is able to represent the changes to, and cross fertilisation between, physicalised performance over time as a complex mapping rather than a closed linear chart of progression.

Because Foucault argues (1977A, p.142) a genealogy is not bound by an illusory search for an 'origin' or 'essence' it thereby encourages recognition of diversity and 'magpie borrowings'. This methodology therefore takes the form of a genealogy investigating the two case study artists, and their close collaborators, who worked within what are generally perceived as two distinctly different lineages of twentieth century actor training that drew on specific forms of embodied and extended play, that ultimately led to early forms of collaborative and devised Embodied Theatre. A genealogical approach can also account for the fragmented, and at times contradictory or unrealised, areas of this practice rather than attempting to present a unified picture. Foucault suggests that a genealogy should consider the passing events in 'their proper dispersion; to identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us' (Foucault 1977A, p.146). These are areas that would often be omitted from

conventional histories for fear of appearing messy or contradictory but they are crucial elements of this area of creative and experimental practice for both Bing and Chekhov. A Foucauldian genealogy provides spaces for us to consider these contradictions, 'failures', and complexities in the work of the two case study artists and their collaborators allowing for a more detailed analysis of their practice.

## **5. Genealogies of Embodied Practice**

As has become apparent, it is crucial to address the issues of embodiment in relation to Bing and Chekhov's practice. As the material body has often been systematically elided by Western philosophical, literary and critical discourse, but is seen and experienced as completely psychophysically connected by both Bing and Chekhov, it is important to develop an approach that will give the 'body', or questions of 'embodiment', and systems of imaginative embodied play, the discursive space that it requires. Foucault recognises the material body as a site of politics, culture, ideology and as bound by history, and his writings have been particularly significant in this respect (see 1977B). He maintains that the body is: 'directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold on it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs' (1977B, p.25). Importantly he also perceives the body as the centre of any analysis of descent in a genealogical study (1977A, p.148). This is central to the examination of Bing and Chekhov and the way in which their different experiences and methods were located in their own, and their collaborators, experiences of embodiment. Foucault argues that there has been a development of what he defines as the 'political technologies' of the body which he understands as a process of 'coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, gestures, its behaviour' resulting in its entrance into a 'machinery of power' (1977B, p.138). In his view these technologies of control do not operate by treating the body en masse but rather by working in a subtle and insidiously individual manner on the ways the subject knows

her/himself. This also applies to the practitioners considered in this thesis and the particular physical regimes that they used and developed. Indeed Bing and Chekhov recognised the impact of the various different regimes and rhythms that impact on the actor's body and both developed techniques, facilitated by play, which can be seen as a resistance to the social and imaginative conditioning of the human body, mind and imagination, which will be addressed in Chapters 2-5.

Recent critical discourse regarding embodiment and actor training now recognises that our understandings of the body-mind relationship are culturally specific, not universal, and are related to systems of control and power. At times the case study practitioners discuss these assumptions explicitly, but on other occasions their views are implicit in their practical methods, writings or metaphors, and therefore deconstructive strategies may be required. However, their model was one of body-mind integration that also accounted for a notion of spirit, will, energy and relational exchange, which was unusual in their time. In critical terms a dichotomous understanding of the body and mind has only recently been challenged and still prevails in many cultural and intellectual practices where the metaphorical status of the term 'mind' may pass unnoticed. Consequently, we need to remember that Bing and Chekhov's position existed in opposition to most dominant intellectual positions in the early part of the twentieth century.

The academic disciplines of theatre, dance and performance studies have now generated considerable critical material on the body-mind relationship and physicalised practices during the twentieth century, drawing on a wide range of theoretical disciplines. These developments corresponded to a growing interest in the material 'body' in poststructuralist, phenomenological and feminist discourses and are markedly different to much of the earlier critical reflections on performance. Literature has crucially recognised the material body as a site of complex codes, politics, culture and ideology, and in more specific terms, as a site of subjectivity and, indeed of 'mind' or 'reason'. Therefore this genealogy

analyses the different ways that the creative relationship between body, mind, spirit, will and energy is used in, and played with, in different methods developed by Bing and Chekhov. This is much more than an overly simplistic and reductive notion of the 'body' and this broader more integrated and perspective is now supported by various studies in cognitive science, neurology, philosophy and psychology (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999, Damasio 2000).

It is also necessary to carefully consider the types of language and various metaphors used by Bing, Chekhov and their collaborators to try to explain their embodied practices/experiences and these are discussed throughout the thesis. In their conception of embodied creativity they also use various spiritual, ritual, moral and ethical concepts and metaphors. The metaphors they use attempt to construct shared languages, embodied exercises and forms of play that serve to articulate and develop non-verbal, energetic and transformative experiences. In addition actors are required to 'feel', 'sense' and 'imagine' in embodied ways in the training developed by Bing and Chekhov. These performative concepts and tools are often dismissed by rationalist discourse but are critical to these forms of play and are something can be felt and understood by practitioners who embody them. Helpfully Foucault's acknowledgement of the centrality of the body in genealogy is linked to his notion of 'effective' history which provides a marked contrast to the objective and distant stance taken by conventional histories and rationalist discourse. An effective history, he proposed: 'shortens its vision to those things nearest to it – the body, the nervous system, nutrition, digestion, and energies [...] It reverses the surreptitious practice of historians, their pretension to examine things furthest from themselves' (1977A, p.155). Foucault continued: 'genealogy must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history – in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts (ibid, pp.139-140). This allows for the consideration of experiences and ideas about such areas as 'instinct' and 'impulse' and also the relational forms of play that underpin the approaches developed by Bing and Chekhov



that are discussed in Chapters 2-5 of the thesis.

## **6. Feminist Forms of Historiography**

Foucault's understanding of emergence within a genealogical study does not represent a 'closed field' and he claims that no one individual can be awarded responsibility for an emergence 'since it always occurs in the interstice' (1977A, p.150). This notion is valuable as Bing and Chekhov worked closely with various teachers, directors, students and various other collaborators and often existed in a type of creative and personal 'interstice'. Despite the attempts of some of the more traditional actor training and theatre histories to isolate individual ownership and pure origin this is problematic in relation to collaborative theatre practices. Intertwined with Bing and Chekhov's interpersonal and embodied experiences were the various creative and power relationships they encountered in various relationships between director/actor, teacher/student and collaborator/collaborator, artist/ensemble. Therefore we need to be cautious of assuming that the learning experience between Bing, Chekhov and their respective directors/teachers was a one-way directional exchange from the person who held more structural, economic or gender-related power, to the person who held a more traditionally subservient or less powerful position. Significantly, the way in which they were to use forms of play, and the concomitant play-enabling skills they developed as teachers/actors/directors, recognises this principle and places students at the centre of their own learning experience.

The intention to re-position Bing and her work in this study, building on the work tentatively started by others, to re-consider her practice can be seen to follow a larger, and older, feminist project in relation to historical research. Sheila Rowbotham's seminal study *Hidden From History* (1977) started to question 'in what conditions have women produced and reproduced their lives, both through their labour and through procreation; how has the free expression of this activity been distorted and blocked by the circumstances of society?'

(p.ix). This project of reconsidering women in historical studies and within the wider discourse of history as an intellectual field has continued and expanded into different fields since the 1970s. However, as Joan Wallace Scott has argued 'women's history does not have a long-standing and definable historiographic tradition within which interpretations can be debated and revised. Instead, the subject of women has been either grafted on to other traditions, or studies in isolation from them' (1999, p.16). In the context of performance and theatre studies there is a body of work which continues this feminist project (see Case 1988, Hart 1989, Aston 1999). However, for the most part this field tends to either address a canon of (often previously hidden) female playwrights, addresses the practice of female directors, provides histories about artists or companies who explicitly chose to address feminist/queer themes or aesthetics, consider the material conditions of women working in the theatre industry, or apply feminist theory to analytic considerations of performance and representation, rather than specifically addressing the history and practice of actor training developed by women. As Alissa Clarke (2009) has noted in relation to early psychophysical practices developed by Grotowski, Barba and Brook:

Despite [the psychophysical field now being in a process of change with regards to female practitioners], the practices and writings of those male performer trainers who began work in the twentieth-century are frequently accepted, and treated or revered as canonical. This serves to discursively construct and uphold a dominant paradigm of a powerful 'genealogy of sons and fathers' (Irigaray qtd. In Whitford, 'Section 1' 23).

(Clarke 2009, p.25)

Clarke notes that in Grotowski's own language the trainer or director is represented as the metaphorical 'strict father' or the 'tyrant' (ibid, p.27). This is clearly mirrored by Copeau being known as the 'Patron' of the VC. Her own work offers an extremely useful consideration of the practice of Phillip Zarrilli and Sandra Reeve in relation to what she defines as a subversive Maternal Genealogy, drawing on the critical frames of Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. Subsequently, she has started the process of constructing an alternative feminist genealogy of actor training.

To some extent the analysis of Bing in this study presents a “Her-story” as explained by Scott: ‘As the play on the word “history” implied, the point was to give value to an experience that had been ignored (hence devalued) and to insist on female agency in the making of history’ (1999, p.18). She argues that the advantage of this form of historiography is that it ‘departs from the framework of conventional history and offers a new narrative, different periodization, and different causes’ (ibid., p.19) and asserts ‘that “personal, subjective experience” matters as much as “public and political activities,” indeed that the former influence the latter’ (ibid., p.20). However, she highlights a number of problems related to this approach including the way in which it can assume that considering women’s experiences as being valid for historical study attributes automatic worth to everything that women have contributed and that this approach ‘tends to isolate women as a special and separate topic of history’ (ibid, p.21). Whilst this project does not seek to create a ‘Her-story’ which either automatically assumes that whatever Bing did was positive and successful, or which isolates her from what I have already defined as a highly collaborative and hybrid exchange with many other practitioners, it will be useful in terms of the way in which it provides the opportunity to create a new genealogical narrative, and to consider her practice from a different perspective. Scott also argues that the feminist historical project could draw on Foucault’s position outlined in his text *The History of Sexuality* and suggest that this would:

end such seeming dichotomies as state and family, public and private, work and sexuality. And it would pose questions about the interconnections among realms of life and social organization now treated quite separate from one another. With this notion of politics, one could offer a critique of history that characterized it not simply as an incomplete record of the past but as a participant in the production of knowledge that legitimized the exclusion or subordination of women.

(1999, p. 26)

In the context of both Bing and Chekhov a selective borrowing from the strategies utilised in ‘Her-stories’, along with the interconnected approach to feminist history that Scott develops drawing on Foucault, would appear useful

and revealing. It also offers a more complex approach that will help to deal with the case of Bing who although she was a bourgeois artist was also a divorced woman (with one child born out of marriage), working and supporting her children, very early in the twentieth century. Whilst her work did not appear to address explicitly feminist themes, her historical positioning is interesting in this respect. In addition to this, the forms of embodied play, and the related techniques and ethics of play-enabling that both she and Chekhov developed contained a curious radicalism which needs to be evaluated in this context. It also provides useful ways of addressing the particular styles of play-enabling and the concomitant way that this empowered and respected actors as artists.

## **7. Expellees and Unbelonging**

This notion of 'Her-story' also points to a methodology that enables this research project to consider how Bing, and also Chekhov in different ways, worked from the margins and to some extent as the 'outsiders'. As a result of his religious beliefs in Russia, followed by his repeated geographic and cultural relocations over the years, Chekhov was often the 'outsider' either in terms of nationality, cultural/religious practice or political ideology. Bing was also an 'outsider' on a number of levels, not least because she was a woman, but also in relation to the role/s she played in the companies and schools along with her personal involvement with Copeau. The work of Vilém Flusser (2003) on the notion of the expellee may be helpful in this respect.

As noted, Chekhov had been classified as an 'alien' whilst in Russia because of his religious and artistic practices and was marginalised for working outside of the dominant hegemony. Marowitz claims that in his last years in Russia it was some of Chekhov's closest collaborators that had joined with Diky in his 'harsh campaign of criticism against Chekhov's leadership' (2004, p.12). Gordon (1985) argues that Chekhov's career suffered as a result of this enforced emigration in a manner similar to other Russian artists working in exile at that time. Indeed, as Kirillov (2005) explains, for many decades after his

departure it was impossible to openly discuss Chekhov's legacy as he was seen as a 'traitor-emigrant' by the Soviet regime. Although Chekhov's books had been published elsewhere from 1928 onwards they 'were known [only] to a small circle of theatre professionals in Russia thanks to the underground printing of his work' (p.1). He notes that it was not until 1986 when Chekhov's publications were printed in Russia (ibid). Gordon points out that when Chekhov had contact with other Russian émigrés when living in Paris he still appeared to be excluded from these re-located communities due to his perceived political standing, or lack of it (1995, p.11). As noted, Chekhov also spent time working with the Jewish Habima theatre company in Europe after their departure from Russia. This is significant as they too were a 'homeless' or 'outsider' company who had not yet moved to Palestine. During the Second World War Beevor claims that Chekhov was asked to disclaim his Jewish heritage by his ex-wife in order to protect their daughter who was living in Germany under the Nazi regime (2005, p.144). Robert Leach argues that Chekhov was also an outsider, in terms of his historical position in that his actor-centred practices were not of 'his time', which was 'predominantly the time of the rise of the director [...] so that his ideas as a 'foreign' actor were unlikely to rival those of say, a Strasberg or a Kazan' (1997, p.67). So in certain ways Chekhov was working in the 'wrong' time, often in the 'wrong' countries (as a misunderstood, or under-appreciated, exile), he was also often the 'wrong' nationality at the 'wrong' time/ place (e.g. working in Latvia when hostility towards Russians was growing) and, lastly, he often held the 'wrong' spiritual/political beliefs.

Whilst Bing did not experience the same geographical dislocation as Chekhov she was positioned as 'other' by her Jewish ancestry in France during World War II (she was forced to wear the star) but also in her context by gender. She was a working lone-parent and during her time with these companies she negotiated pregnancy, childbirth and early years parenting, whilst developing work as a practitioner. In some respects it was Bing who 'got her hands dirty' with play by actually committing time to the work at Naumburg's

school and working with other women practitioners similarly interested in creative play. She undertook 'the women's work' for the development of much of the company's play methods but ironically, without this more 'feminine' and embodied role these techniques may never have fully evolved. Bing negotiated a pivotal, but complex, mixture of roles in this French genealogy (actor, teacher, researcher, director in her own right, collaborator, mother and lover) and was seminal in the development in play methods, yet she was not always given structural power or control or even adequate acknowledgement. She has also been exiled from the French narrative, partly due to this complexity that is not well suited to a traditional history, and partly to maintain a powerful paternal history of actor training. So, like Chekhov, it is likely that she experienced some sense of un-belonging.

I propose that this positioning as 'an expellee' may also have played a key part in the way in which they developed their play methods and the style in which they chose to share their practice. Flusser (2003) argues that '[e]xpellees were disturbing factors and were removed to make the surroundings even more ordinary than before' (2003, p.82) and the way in which sections of the Russian theatre community reacted to Chekhov's practice, and betrayed his trust, would certainly appear to support this claim. In the light of this, it might be possible to perceive Chekhov's use of Anthroposophy in personal-artistic terms, as one of the ways in which he was able to creatively process this 'ocean of chaotic information' which Flusser claims characterises the experience of the exile. Julia Whitworth (2003) correlates the growth of interest in training with 'another major trend in the 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde: a growing interest in non-European spiritual and esoteric practice and increased attention to the relationship between religious/spiritual ideology and the creative and personal journey of the theatre artist' (2003, p.22). This is of specific interest to this research with regards to the way in which the case study practitioners attempt to articulate embodied experiences and performance practices as there are spiritual dimensions to the work. However, although there was an interest in non-European spiritual practice, and indeed the whole movement of Primitivism (see

Ramsay Burt 1998), this interest and exploration of spirituality also included elements of the Christian and Jewish faith and mystic practices. Indeed, Chekhov's use of Anthroposophy on a personal level, and in his practice, along with Bing/Copeau's conversation to Catholicism and their related ideas about spirituality needs to be acknowledged. Also the very notion of continual change being key to seeing and experiencing beyond or 'through' the habitual fog of the heimat also links to Chekhov and Bing's belief that actor's should be aspiring to playfully change, to transform, into someone or some-thing entirely different to themselves precisely to avoid remaining within their personal psychophysical heimat. It is precisely an actor's personal customs and habits that Chekhov and Bing are trying to move away from.

In addition to this, the VC (and the later companies) decided to exile themselves from dominant commercial theatre in 1924 when they left Paris and moved to rural Burgundy and their self positioning as outsiders is significant in this respect. It is an interesting parallel that Chekhov was to work at Dartington Hall (along with Kurt Jooss, Rudolf von Laban and various other exiled artists) within an alternative pedagogic and artistic community in rural Devonshire. The establishment of these alternative and 'outsider' communities for period of their professional life arguably enabled Bing and Chekhov to develop new avenues for their work, in particular with regards to embodied play.

The flexibility in Chekhov's chosen formats, and the chosen writing style, for sharing his methods, and the way in which he encouraged actors to learn experientially through embodied experiment with them in relation to their own creative individuality, may also be related to his own unpredictable history as an 'expellee' and the way in which the techniques developed over time. The type of empowerment given through the various forms of play developed by Bing can perhaps also be seen in relation to her own position as a pivotal insider-outsider and the fact that she synthesised many different, and often changing, techniques into her own. This in turn may also relate to their engagement with many different students and artists, often from this position of the 'other' or the

‘expellee’.

## **8. The Structure of the Thesis**

Chapter 1 analyses the practices of Bing and Chekhov in relation to a wider web of tangled taxonomies and traces the field of literature relating to their work. The second chapter argues for an expanded notion of play and discusses the emergence of the key features of Embodied Theatre. The third and fourth chapters address Chekhov and Bing’s embodied play methods in relation to actor training and characterisation respectively. Chapter 5 explores how Bing and Chekhov also developed forms of extended play that trained students with skills for collaborative theatre-making in their studios/schools. It also addresses how these methods of play were applied to rehearsal and as a form of analysis in this pedagogic context. This chapter explores the way in which these extended forms of play changed the relationship to the text and started to evolve the early ideas which led to what later became known as devised performance. The conclusion considers the way in which Bing and Chekhov’s use of embodied play can both resist, and has been subsumed into British commercial theatre, and how this relates to devised Embodied Theatre. It addresses questions of the ethics and radicalism in relationship to these play practices, and issues of artistic ownership. Finally, the study will consider the way in which this revision of earlier forms of Embodied Theatre relate to contemporary practice and ask whether these play practices retain the potential to produce radical performance.



# Chapter 1: tangled taxonomies and literature

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## 1. Introduction

Whilst being aware of the dangers of seeking overly rigid taxonomies of performance practice, it is necessary to define the type of performance being addressed in this study. Therefore this chapter will start by briefly proposing that Embodied Theatre might be the most useful term to use in relation to the work of Bing and Chekhov and will subsequently present an analysis of the tangled taxonomies that intersect the wider fields of Physical Theatres and a consideration of which of these categories and definitions might be enlightening, limiting, or problematic in relation to the work of the chosen case studies. The chapter will then review the existing literature on the work of the two case study artists, Bing and Chekhov, and consider the issues related to the project of writing about embodied acting practices.

## 2. Tracing the field

There are a number of approaches and ideas about embodied performance that were shared by Bing et al and also Chekhov, some of which have been noted by Zarrilli in relation to his discussion of his own specific intercultural understanding of psychophysical acting (2009). However, in this context it seems important to identify the general principles which are both needed for, but concurrently are learnt through, embodied play and which relate to transformation (and character) which is central to both of these practices but do not apply across to all the practices covered by Zarrilli's model. Both Bing and Chekhov's practice was renowned for being radically actor-centred and their techniques fundamentally challenged the opinion that the actor existed merely to service the director's interpretation of the playwright's vision. Chekhov placed them at the centre of the creative process and he provocatively claimed

that '[t]he director, the stage designer, etc., are all accessories, but the actor is the theatre' (1985, p.158). The element of embodied play used in their approaches further extends a creative empowerment of the actor as it requires teachers and directors to relinquish a level of control in the process as, like the actors themselves, they cannot always pre-determine or control the results of this play. Both forms of embodied play worked with a model of an integrated body and mind, are psychophysical in Chekhov's terms, and explore the constant interplay between an actor's body and psychology. Kusler discusses this principle that was to become adopted by Copeau, Bing and their collaborators. She explains:

Copeau felt that the natural movement of craftsmen at work or children at play could be developed in actors by exercises linking the external action with an internal state of mind. Although he tended to work from the outside, or the physical action first, he wanted to develop an accompanying "state of intimate consciousness, particular to the movement accomplished". Thus Copeau seems to have shifted his focus from a psychological study of the character's inner stage of mind to a focus on the inner feeling of the action itself. For Copeau, lack of sincerity in movement often stemmed from lack of internal preparation and follow through – a self-consciousness rather than an action-consciousness.

(Kusler 1979, citing Copeau's notes 37 August, 1919 p.19)

This was also related to the shared idea that the actor's work needed to be imaginatively justified (cf. Kusler 1979, Chekhov 2002). In addition to their practices being based on the model of an integrated body and mind, Chekhov's practice also draws on the energetic, relational, ethical and spiritual dimensions of embodied acting. This was shared in large part by Bing et al, however, Chekhov also explored the notions of thinking, feeling and willing and also drew on Steiner's notion of the threefold body which leads to some areas of divergence.

This study will argue that both practitioners are non-dualistic in their approach, and indeed are both multi-dimensional and exist in relation around, and beyond, an actor's individual material body and their personal, subjective, experiences. In large part this is facilitated by and through creative forms of

embodied, social and relational play. Both strands of practice give this form of imagination, which is fully embodied, equality to intellectual and analytical thought (word, reasoning and logic) and these forms of play work on the assumption that this multi-dimensional embodied self is a medium of creative learning, knowledge and wisdom in its own right (Chekhov 2002, Rudlin 2000). Central to both practices is the assumption that the actor's imaginative embodiment holds expressive potential (internally and externally) in the act of transformation and that this is linked to the actor's imaginative processes. Both also explore the psychophysical potential in what we can loosely term archetypal gesture/movement/form and character types (Rudlin 2000, Chekhov 2002) (see Appendix V). The methods that they both developed enabled actors to use their embodied-imagination to generate sensations to stir their character's inner life, rather than drawing on their own personal emotional memories or trying to force emotional responses.

Related to this is the ability of the actor to be both fully engaged within their performance, and to have empathy for, and a deep connection with their character, but also retain a level of distance so that they are not totally lost in the feelings of the character and can 'see' and 'direct' their expressive performance from outside. Chekhov's notion of a Divided Conscious relates to this technique which he linked to an interpretation of Steiner's understanding of the 'Higher Ego'. He saw the higher ego as the actor's more creative self, which was different to their more 'everyday' self or consciousness because it was not 'closed off egotistically into itself' (2005, p.147), and he believed that they worked dynamically together. Copeau also argues '[The actor] has had to set up, to master and assimilate all the processes of metamorphosis which simultaneously distances him from his role and lead him into it' (Copeau 1990, p.75). These forms of embodied play require, and concurrently enable, actors to move away from their personal embodied habits, histories and personalities in order for them to transform into characters (or beings/masks) markedly different to their 'everyday' self. Indeed Chekhov argues: 'It is a crime to chain and imprison the actor within the limits of his so-called 'personality'' (2002,

p.27). To achieve this Chekhov also used the techniques such as Crossing the Threshold, along with a use of the Ideal Centre, sense of Ease, and Radiation to enable actors to discover a more neutral, open, ready, and energised starting point. Bing and Copeau used Neutrality and the use of Noble Mask to achieve a similar state (see Copeau 1990, Kusler 1979, Felner 1985) (see Appendix VI).

Both strands of embodied play are rooted in, and dependent on, ensemble practice and focus on the related skills of actors being open to receive from partners, the audience, events, things, the outside world and their own imaginations (developing a specific type of open-heartedness in Chekhov's terms), and the ability to give (and for Chekhov to Radiate). Both forms of play are built on a dynamic exchange between these two states in ensemble practice, and in relation to the audience. Whilst they supported the individuality of actors as creative artists neither approach was individualistic, the actor's practice is always in relation to the other actors, the audience, the imagination in all its playful manifestations and, for Chekhov, 'higher worlds'. In this sense both practices are Relational in Buber's sense of the term (1999) and consequently they are built on certain ethical principles. Both Chekhov's and Bing's practice sought to creatively explore the notion of style and form and were not constricted by the rigid limitations of Naturalistic theatre, indeed play can be seen to have influenced certain repertoire choices (see Appendix III). Whilst neither strand of practice rejected text-based theatre, both forms of play operated by giving space to imaginative embodiment prior to the introduction of words and text (Chekhov 2002, Felner 1985). Chekhov and Bing's methods provide a radical contrast to acting techniques which the former believed was overly-dependent on 'dry' analytic thought (2002, p.25), i.e. practices which foreground an analytic and highly intellectual understanding of the text. These approaches tend to marginalize, or dominate, embodied play and as the thesis will demonstrate this was a central technique to develop creativity and inspired acting. Although neither strand of practice disallows this form of analytic thinking, they both delay its use until later in the process. As argued in Chapter 2, these principles were fundamentally underpinned by a network of embodied

play practices and it is this that enables the various elements of their practice to shine.

### **3. Embodied Theatre**

Although Bing and Chekhov both worked mostly in text-based theatre, their approaches were actor centred and drew on what Daboo describes as the 'phenomenon of the embodied imagination' (2007, p.261) and forms of extended creative play which taught actors the ability to create performance material. An application of these methods of play ultimately led to theatre-making processes that were to challenge the dominance of pre-existing play texts and to some extent a hierarchical form of directing. However, whilst they developed approaches to enable actors to develop a highly skilled exploration of imaginative and specifically corporeal performance (which was given the space to signify in its own rights, rather than simply adorning, or physically enacting a script) they did not reject text or the spoken word, and as has been noted they did not view the actor's embodiment in simplistic physical or dualistic terms. As this study will seek to demonstrate, their practices are based on very specific uses of embodied imagination, energy and consciousness which are triggered, and developed through, relational play practices. The issue of categorization of their work is therefore complex, and simplistic or essentialist definitions tend to be problematic. Of course a wide range of physicalised performance practices have existed throughout history but there is currently a range of terms used to describe intentionally physicalised training and performance practices in the British context, in addition to Dance. The most prevalent terms are: New Mime; Total Theatre; Dance-Theatre; Visual Theatre; Physical Theatres; Movement for Actors; and Psychophysical Acting. These seven terms are closely interrelated and whilst some forms and terms, like Mime, have existed for thousands of years, others like Physical Theatres evolved in the twentieth century. However, this study will use, and build on, Phelim McDermott's term 'Embodied Theatre' as he argues: '[t]he dream is one of not just the body but the whole being an 'embodied theatre' or a 'radiant

performer” (2007, p. 207):

[A]n embodied theatre [...] combines the body, the imagination, the emotions and the voice. This performance also has a relationship beyond its own body-in-the-space and is in energetic dialogue with other performers, the design environment and light, and the audience. This whole energy field is a system in constant flux as it relates to itself and organises the system of emotions, impulses, intellect and storytelling. Surely the term ‘physical theatre’ is inadequate to describe what it actually points us towards if we think this ends at the body itself.

(2007, p.204)

However, before proposing a developed use of McDermott’s term, it is necessary to trace through the taxonomies and terms that intersect with the wider field of physicalised performance, or what is often termed the physical theatre continuum, in order to demonstrate why it might be more useful to this study than some of the other categories used but also to consider what an analysis of these other terms, and their related literature, might bring to the analytic framework used in this study.

#### **4. Tangled Taxonomies**

Markedly physicalised performance practice has been, and is still, classified by these seven categories and frequently by more than one of these terms, dependent on historical era, commercial theatre fashions, context and perspective. For example, the work of Bing and her collaborators could be labelled, from a retrospective contemporary perspective, as New/Modern Mime, Total Theatre, Physical Theatre, an example of Psychophysical Acting, and a forerunner for strands of Visual Theatre. In addition to this, aspects of her approach and technique have been taught as part of Movement for Actors syllabi at various drama schools, although it is more commonly attributed to Copeau and / or Lecoq (see Evans 2009). This reflects the close cross fertilisation of both the terms and some of the practices they are seen to represent (as noted by Zarrilli 1995, Hodge 2000, and Murray and Keefe 2007), however there are some distinct and fundamental differences. Whilst

Movement for Actors is a particular pedagogic category, rather than the term for a final mode of performance, it warrants consideration because of the physicalised processes and practices that are used and analysed in this field. The complexity and history of each of the categories under discussion warrants investigation.

As this research project was well under way prior to the publications by Murray and Keefe (Murray and Keefe 2007, Keefe and Murray 2007) which trace the practices that they placed under the wider umbrella term of Physical Theatres, and which features the work of both of the case studies addressed in this thesis, it is important to build on, respond to, and at times critique, their work in order to develop this area of scholarship. Therefore, their work will be referred to extensively throughout this chapter.

#### **4.1. Mime**

Mime is the oldest of these terms referring to either solo or group performance which may be mimetic, illusionist or abstract in style, with and without the use of the spoken word. Thomas Leabhart distinguishes between 'an earlier nineteenth-century silent pantomime tradition' and 'modern mime, which uses sounds and words as well as movement metaphor' (1989, pp.1-2). Leabhart recognises that the work of Copeau and his collaborators was seminal in the development of the later form and he also points out that, contrary to popular belief, the use of speech and sound is not unique to Modern Mime practice in the twentieth century. He also makes the important point that historically the absence of spoken text was often due to various social and cultural controls. Significantly, the development of Modern Mime (sometimes also referred to as New Mime) by 'Copeau's students' were practitioners who had actually received the majority of their consistent practical training from Bing. In some cases they had also worked alongside her as actor-collaborators in the later companies. Dasté, Jean Dasté, Dorcy and Decroux (who later worked with other mime artists such as Jean-Louis Barrault and Lecoq) exemplify this

(see Felner 1985). In general it was Bing who devoted more time to the training of these students, as will be addressed later in this study, and Felner's seminal study of Mime practice (1985) often refers to aspects of what she terms New Mime specifically as 'Bing Technique' (p. 96). The terms Mime, Modern Mime and New Mime are used to refer to objective forms of mime, with its creation of physical illusions, and also subjective mime which utilises a more abstract movement lexis (i.e. the form developed by Decroux). Whilst Bing was seminal in the development of Modern/New Mime, mask work and improvisation, this thesis will argue that she developed an approach that was in some respects broader, and more flexible in its relation to final performance aesthetic/genre/form, than the category of Mime implies. Murray and Keefe's (2007) recognition of this strand of practice as being one of the main lineages of what they identify as Physical Theatres reflects the way it relates to, and fed into, a wider realm of performance than the term Mime indicates. However, there is a complex history in the movement away from the use of Mime as a term and the related debates that took place amongst artists in this respect which is very well discussed by Chamberlain (2007). So, whilst Mime might describe certain aspects of Bing's work it is not useful as an overall category for her practice. The term is not applicable to the work of Chekhov in any pure sense, although the use of certain forms of expressive movement and gesture indicate certain interesting instances of convergence.

#### **4.2. Total Theatre**

Total Theatre is a term which dates back to Richard Wagner's nineteenth-century concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* as the total, or integrated, work of art that employs all the various different meaning-making systems available to the performing arts. But, as E.T. Kirby (1969) points out the Wagnerian concept is not one simply of multiplicity of expressive media but requires 'an effective interplay among the various elements or a significant synthesis of them... it must always be intensive, effecting an integration of components' (1969, p.xiii) and he goes on to argue '[w]hile totality as an idea is extensive and all-inclusive,



it is this relationship between elements, rather than an accumulation of means, which actually distinguishes the form' (ibid., p. xii). The term Total Theatre was later taken up, but re-modelled in the early twentieth century by such artists as Antonin Artaud and Jean-Louis Barrault (1974) where it signalled a freedom from the dominance of the text and an actor-centred approach to more physical forms of performance, and this term continues to be used in the early twenty-first century. In 1984 the British Mime Action Group (MAG) was formed to promote the 'art of mime and related disciplines' but in 1989 the name of the MAG publication was changed to *Total Theatre: the magazine for mime, physical and visual theatre*, the name of the organisation was similarly changed some years later in 1997. Chamberlain (2007) provides an insightful discussion about the decision to rename the group and argues that he personally felt the new term of Total Theatre was 'going too far away from the core of mime/physical theatre' (p.155). Since the late 1990s, Total Theatre has frequently been used as a loose umbrella term that brings together work described as New/Modern Mime, Dance-Theatre, Visual Theatre and Physical Theatre. It also relates to training practices that also form part of the syllabi for certain Movement for Actors courses.

However, this more recent use of the term is problematic in terms of categorisation. Whereas Wagner sought a particular notion of synthesis and totality in this form, many later practitioners have explored the possible interplays between the various elements of performance without necessarily the desire to integrate them into a closed totality. One of the difficulties with the current usage is that it is not always completely clear whether the term is being used in an earlier Wagnerian manner, or to reference the ideals of Artaud and Barrault, or whether it is being used as a short-hand for a form of performance which is an intentional hybrid and chooses to explore different theatrical meaning-making systems and relationships and interplays between them, or is simply being used as an even broader off-shoot from the earlier use of the term Physical Theatres. If we assume the latter use of the term it becomes too expansive, covering an incredible range of avant-garde practices, many of

which do not focus on an actor-centred physicalised training or processes, and may not use forms of creative and explicitly embodied play in their methods. Chamberlain's concern that the term Total Theatre becomes an even looser and more nebulous category than Mime/Physical Theatres appears valid in this context. Consequently it will not be used in relation to the case study artists in this study.

#### **4.3. Dance-Theatre**

Dance-Theatre is a term that developed later in the twentieth-century and once again there is not a consensus about exactly what type of performance it refers to. Although the emergence of this term is often linked to the productions of Pina Bausch in the 1970s and 1980s, the key *Ausdruckstanz* practitioners such as Rudolf Von Laban and Kurt Jooss had been experimenting with a marrying of different aspects of dance and theatre practice much earlier in the century. It can be argued that key aspects of dance-theatre practice had been developed during this period, although known by a different term and related to other, earlier expressionist, avant-garde, and modernist influences. Alexandra Carter (1988) argues that Dance-Theatre, as a term, emerged as various physical practices started to strain against their earlier classifications. Murray and Keefe situate much contemporary Dance-Theatre under their umbrella term of Physical Theatres along with performance practices drawing on other forms of modern and postmodern dance and specific techniques such as contact improvisation. They discuss this area of practice in some detail (2007, pp.75-92). Whilst this term is not directly relevant to the work of Bing and Chekhov there are some areas of overlap in terms of their use of expressive and archetypal movement, embodied awareness, movement analysis and certain ideas about physical / gestural articulation. For example Chamberlain (2004) noted a level of similarity between Chekhov and Laban's use of certain forms of expressive movement. Consequently, moments of intersection will be considered where necessary in the following analysis, although the category will not be applied to the overall practice of Bing and Chekhov.

#### **4.4. Visual Theatre**

Visual Theatre is a term that has become prevalent in recent years but is also used to retrospectively refer to theatre and art practices that date back to the turn of the twentieth century. For example, David Gothard at the Total Theatre/International Mime Festival's annual lecture in 2005 cited Edward Gordon Craig as the 'godfather' of Visual Theatre. This strand can be seen to include the lineages of practice reaching back to the work of Adolphe Appia, Antonin Artaud, Tadeusz Kantor and more recently Robert Wilson. Often the term Visual Theatre refers to work which consistently foregrounds the visual aspects of performance, and frequently includes an explicitly visual use of the performer's body, but does not necessarily develop or use physicalised performance methodologies for a transformational approach to characterisation. To confuse matters further, Kirby's anthology on *Total Theatre* (1969) also includes chapters on the work of Craig, Appia, and Artaud and this highlights the indistinct boundary between these two terms. On a basic level this term is not helpful to this study as whilst the two case study artists' work did engage in visual dimensions of performance (i.e. the use of space, both real and imagined, an embodied and visual sense of form, the relationship to other actor's bodies and objects, masks, architecture, etc.) their practices were based on actor-centred imaginatively embodied methods that drew on forms of play in contradistinction to many of the practitioners generally associated with Visual Theatre. Therefore, in order to clarify the scope of this project, Visual Theatre as a term will not be used in relation to Bing and Chekhov's work.

#### **4.5. Physical Theatres**

Physical Theatres as a term has been increasingly used since the 1980s in Britain to refer to an extensive range of markedly physicalised performance practices. It is a term commonly attributed to Lloyd Newson who in 1986 named his newly founded company DV8 Physical Theatre. However, as Dymphna Callery (2001) and Murray and Keefe (2007) point out, the term was

used by various practitioners prior to this date. Murray and Keefe's two publications on physical theatre provide the most comprehensive survey of this field of performance in the British context to date. Although it is an evolving and highly contentious term Physical Theatres has now become a short-hand used to acknowledge the growth and development of intentionally physicalised training, rehearsal and production aesthetics, and numerous practitioners and companies now define their own work as Physical Theatre, or are often problematically labelled with this category by others. The late 1990s witnessed an increase in courses offering this mode of performance in British Universities and Drama Schools as part of their syllabi along with the launch of Britain's first MA specifically focussing on the study of Physical Theatre (1998). In this respect the term has been institutionalised and has entered the theatre economy of the west. Physical Theatres is also a more expansive term than New/Modern Mime, Dance-Theatre, Visual Theatre or Psychophysical Acting in that it is often used to encompass, or intersect with, all of these forms of physicalised performance.

Whilst the term can be seen to demonstrate the close connections between these practices, its application to such a wide range of performance has resulted in the term being so nebulous it is unclear what type of work it is meant to represent. Callery argues that 'the term is virtually impossible to define' (2001, p.3) but notes that the 'emergence of physical theatre at the turn of the millennium seems to represent a change in the nature of acting in response to a shift away from text-based theatre and the Stanislavskian notion of preparing a role' (ibid). She goes on to argue that whilst it is not codifiable 'some significant parallels emerge from any investigation of those working in the field' (ibid, p.5) and that physical theatre is 'where the primary means of creation occurs through the body rather than through the mind. In other words, the somatic impulse is privileged over the cerebral in the meaning making process' (ibid, p.4). The later publications by Murray and Keefe provide a more thorough and complex discussion of the field of Physical Theatres. In *Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction* Murray and Keefe (2007) discuss the term itself, map the

field and consider the practices and methods of a series of case study artists. The study provides a thoughtful critical consideration of the performance practices and various related issues. However, the nature of the publication means that its scope is very broad resulting in limited space for more detailed discussion of the specific practices and the relationships between them. Keefe and Murray's second text, *Physical Theatre: A Critical Reader* (2007) is an edited collection which provides a variety of texts and commissioned essays. Whilst, like Callery, they acknowledge the problems inherent in the use of such a broad term and therefore argue for a plural use of the category, Murray and Keefe also attempt to provide some descriptive parameters about the type(s) of performance work they see as being defined by this complex web of practices. As they explain, in their studies they hope to 'locate the changing role of the actor's body and the extent to which contemporary theatre has foregrounded physical expressivity and gestural composition as the main signifying drives for the work in question' (2007, p. 13). They argue that their case study practitioners all develop approaches that insist on 'practices of embodiment, physical expressiveness and corporeal fluency' (ibid, p.17) and they set out to test (with a healthy dose of scepticism) what has been presented in recent years as a claim for 'new and discrete theatre genres that are indeed peculiarly physical and gestural' (ibid, p.4).

Although this term pre-dates the work of Bing and Chekhov who were working in the early twentieth century, they are both placed in the historical lineage of Physical Theatres practice by Murray and Keefe in different ways; the work of Copeau is given a central position in their Introductory text but sadly Bing is never directly named (Murray and Keefe 2007). A translation of, and commentary on, Chekhov's Psychological Gesture by Malaev-Babel is provided in Keefe and Murray's reader (2007, pp. 169-183) and Bing is named by Pitches in his historical chapter (ibid, pp.47-54). Whilst Physical Theatres might appear to be the obvious choice of categorisation for this project in the context of Murray and Keefe's study the way in which the label has become such an all-encompassing term means that it has arguably lost the ability to provide any

type of coherent correlation between practices and this needs to be considered more fully.

The use of this category also inevitably raises fundamental problems about how we define or understand this use of the word 'physical'. It has frequently been argued that all performance involving live human performers is inevitably physical regardless of the extent or style of movement used, resulting in the category being seen as a non sequitur. As Murray and Keefe (2007) point out, work is often seen to be classifiable by the label of Physical Theatres if the performance aesthetic demonstrates a particular type of physicalised expression, but they rightly point out that specific uses of physical performance do not just exist in these contexts. To counter this, and to argue their claim that 'all theatre is physical' (p.159), they attempt to analyse what they define as the physical in theatre referencing a very wide range of texts. Whilst this approach is fruitful in terms of extending the realm of their analysis it further diffuses the scope of their study. However, their concern about using the end 'product' (the production aesthetic) as the central means of identification of a specific physicalised practice is relevant to Bing and Chekhov as their methods can be used in productions where the final aesthetic is not always particularly physical and gestural. Another central difficulty with this term is the way in which it has come to designate a general 'otherness' in relation to the still dominant modernist text-based notion of theatre in Britain. Indeed a number of post-modern, experimental performance companies now use the term to define their own work, regardless of whether or not their methodologies or aesthetics share any of the identifying physicalised features or practices. This means that it becomes very difficult, if not impossible, to analyse the modes of performance it is seen to represent in any real detail. Consequently, the interesting nexus points of convergence, or the dramatic moments of divergence, between these different strands of practice have not been addressed. Whilst Murray and Keefe (2007) rightly resist the pressure to tidy up this complex web of practice to give one modernist totalised definition, they acknowledge there remains such a vagueness relating to the term that it is not always helpful in terms of the

analysis of certain practices that are placed under this umbrella term.

In the light of these problems this study will not be using the term Physical Theatres in relation to the work of Bing and Chekhov or the more recent strands of practice that draw on their earlier methods. Some of the discussions and analyses that have been produced in relation to these more intentionally physicalised methods are nevertheless useful to this study and therefore a consideration of key issues will be briefly considered. Most analyses of Physical Theatres describe it as a practice which intentionally challenges earlier hierarchical views of the different elements of performance. This type of hierarchical perspective is exemplified by Aristotle in his discussion of tragedy in the *Poetics* (1999) in which he identifies six elements that, he argues, determine its quality as a piece of theatre. Aristotle places *muthos* (plot), along with what he perceives as its natural relationship to the written word and thought, at the pinnacle of this theatrical hierarchy. Meanwhile his category of *opsis*, which effectively covers all the aspects of the visual and physical in performance, is presented as relatively insignificant and not worthy of detailed discussion (see Walton 1984). This Western critical inheritance of textual bias in conjunction with a post-Enlightenment dualistic perception of the 'mind' and 'body' has often been used to validate inadequate consideration and a marginalisation of the non-textual aspects of performance, and is therefore problematic in relation to physicalised performance practices in general. However, some of the definitions of, and discussions about Physical Theatres, often in an attempt to reclaim a higher status for physical and visual performance, simply invert the Aristotelian hierarchy and the body-mind dualism which problematically maintains a dichotomous relationship between word/plot and body/movement as either/or, superior/inferior. Judith Mackrell's description of Physical Theatres exemplifies this: '[It is] another loose term which describes any kind of theatrical performance where the use of movement and gesture is more important than words, but where no strict dance or mime technique is involved' (1992, p.148). Whilst Mackrell's comment is clearly referring to the dance end of the Physical Theatres spectrum (and the reference to use of

technique is more complex than Mackrell acknowledges) it still retains the idea that one aspect of performance is 'more important' than another which is problematic.

The dichotomy between 'word' / 'mind' and 'movement' / 'body' presented by various definitions of, and discussions about physicalised performance, also reflects a disembodied view of vocal production, as Barrault points out '[s]peech is originally a pantomime of the mouth. There is therefore no break of continuity between a gesture and a word; both of them physically, are a part of the same creation, the result of a muscular contraction and a respiration' (1974, p.86). However, there is unquestionably a freedom to use, or not to use, spoken word in much of this work and these artists are not always beholden to a playwright. These definitions seem to reflect a belief that there needs to be some new kind of hierarchy or a modernist rejection of the spoken word/text altogether, rather than a fluid plurality of the various meaning-making systems in operation. However, Lloyd Newson, in an interview, discusses how the use of words in certain projects and this is helpful in this context:

Although I'm primarily interested in theatre that deals with images and movement, these have their limitations and more recently I've become interested in combining them with language. Language has a specificity which is very difficult to convey just in movement and images alone [...] It can clarify an ambiguity that might exist. Other times the ambiguity is important to maintain and specificity can kill the power of what has been achieved without language. Language just feels like another tool now that I want to have access to. I don't want to lose the power of movement so I'm trying to find that balance – because too often I see a lot of direction where the words attempt to do all the work.

(Newson in Tushingham 1994, pp.47-48)

Newson's discussion about the balance and relationship between words and movement, ensuring that movement doesn't lose its own signifying power, is certainly relevant to both contemporary practitioners and the earlier work of Bing and Chekhov. This balancing is a crucial methodological and aesthetic concept that needs to be considered. Rather than suggesting a hierarchical rating, there seems to be more of a notion of how to balance between, and



connect, these areas of performance. Related to this is the question of which to foreground at different times in the training, making and performing contexts.

Consequently, it can be argued that these physicalised practices are actually far more transgressive than is implied by some of the inverted hierarchical and dualistic descriptions as practitioners are intentionally using different meaning-making systems free from a dominating system of text, and are exploring the relationships between, and ways of foregrounding, these various aspects of performance, in any way that they deem appropriate for their work. Murray and Keefe wisely highlight the correlation between the history of the rise in Physical Theatres and that of devised performance practices which may, or may not, use text and they note that when artists do use text they often choose to adapt non theatre texts (short stories, poems, novels, fairytales, verbatim texts), work with playwrights or choreographers in a devising/collaborative context, and/or use a wide range of other stimuli for making performance. This relates closely to the work of both Bing in her use of extended play in actor training, and the way in which many of the later productions developed by LC and CQ drew on and developed this approach. The latter two companies also explored this use of play in tandem with collaboration with a writer as part of the company. Chekhov's many theatrical adaptations of short stories, novels and fairytales in his studios, and his professional practice, also exemplify this. Chamberlain also points out that connected to the relationship to the text is the issue of the actor being an artist rather than a puppet that serves the text and director. He argues '[t]here is a constant struggle in twentieth-century theatre between the actor as puppet of the director and actors as creative artists in their own rights' (2007, p.152). This reflects Chekhov's firm belief that actors need to be seen, and to take on the role of, artists in their own right. Bing's work similarly empowered actors and enabled these early forms of devised practice. The way in which Bing and Chekhov's use of play in actor training led to particular ways of working with texts will be considered in chapter five of the thesis.

The over simplistic inversion of traditional hierarchies in some of these debates and definitions possibly represents attempts to articulate the way in which particular physicalised practices draw on 'knowledges' and movement of the body as a starting point for training, exploratory improvisation, experimentation and rehearsal methods, prior to engaging with a certain type of intellectual analysis based on the text/s. Callery in her definition of Physical theatre argues that a defining feature of this work is that the 'somatic impulse' is privileged before 'the cerebral' (2001, p4) in the making process. The idea that the embodied/somatic exploration comes before a certain type of rigid rational intellectual analysis of the text in the training and theatre-making is also supported by Murray and Keefe (2007) and by many practitioners working in the field talking about their own approaches. John Wright, a practitioner whose work draws on the genealogy of both Bing and Chekhov, argues that Physical Theatre is '[a]ny form of theatre that puts movement and action before voice and text. The implication being that you put the play text before the written text' (Wright 2000, p.20) but he does not imply that this makes the text lesser or totally subordinate to other systems of meaning making. Rather it creates a different type of 'embodied' play text. This is by no means a new idea and in the nineteenth century Françoise Delsarte (1811-1871), who explored the expressive potential of embodied performance and gesture, proposed the idea of exploring and expressing movement in the first instance, followed by vocal expression. Jacques-Dalcroze was later to draw on Delsartian principles in his work on Eurythmics which was to influence both the Russian artists early in the twentieth century (see Whyman 2008) and the French collaborators (see Copeau 1990). This was followed by the work of many twentieth century practitioners including Bing and Chekhov.

However, returning to Callery's argument, a cautionary note needs to be made as her statement is in danger of re-affirming the view that 'somatic impulse' (body) and 'cerebral processes' (body) are entirely separate systems. To some extent this statement reflects an assumption that it is possible for

practitioners not to connect mental images, spatial concepts, sensations, feelings with movement and somatic impulses. Lorna Marshall suggest that we see the relationship between brain and body as a constant and equal 'feedback loop' (2001, p.21) and she notes that whilst it is not necessary biologically possible, we can work 'as if' foregrounding physical practices in the early stages of creative exploration in order to work from the sensorimotor base and to keep the initial exploration free from text-based analysis. This is a key issue for discussion and is something quite different from maintaining that all performers can completely, or always wish to, separate aspects of their embodied self. More usefully, she also attempts to address the ways in which the 'body' has its own 'systems of knowledge': 'This does not mean that the intellectual demands of the idea or script are jettisoned. The intellectual is grasped through the physical engagement of the body' (Callery 2001, p.4). If what Callery defines as 'intellectual' can be 'grasped' through the body, this breaks down a dualism between somatic and cerebral, and the body and mind are therefore interconnected and work as a more complex and creative loop in Marshall's terms (2001) between the different aspects of the actor's embodied self. The suggestion that there may be different ways of playfully foregrounding, reading and responding to somatic impulse is useful and something that Bing and Chekhov discuss and practice. Murray and Keefe (2007) argue for a more useful integrated model of embodiment and they discuss what they describe as 'the cognitive and neurological roots of mimesis-empathy-play' (p. 44). They draw on more recent research into mirror neurons and the article written by David George in their reader (Keefe and Murray 2007) to consider what they define as the neurological sources of empathy. In addition to this, they point to the work of Damasio (2000) which discusses the connection between emotions, signals and the brain. This provides a more useful starting point for this analysis although there are aspects of this approach which require further discussion.

#### **4.6. Movement for Actors**

Movement for Actors is a complex term in this taxonomy for a number of reasons. Firstly, it tends to be used in relation to the movement training methods provided by many British and North American mainstream, 'industry accredited', conservatoires for their acting students and often does not relate to the identification of a specific final production or aesthetic. It also covers various movement practices such as Alexander and Feldenkrais Techniques. Secondly, the term itself reflects the way in which 'movement' in performance is still taught in discrete courses on actor training programmes in these industry related schools and is generally not seen as something that can, or should, impact on the actual processes of theatre-making that are used for the student's public productions. In this respect the term itself is problematic in that it assumes that 'movement' is not a core part of all the other areas of the actor's training and can be taught in isolation. This type of segregation of movement/gesture, and frequently a subordination it, at these schools represent an antithesis to the synthetic approaches developed by Bing and Chekhov. Indeed, the schools which actually place 'movement' at the centre of their actor training and theatre-making processes tend to operate outside the industry accredited sector. Training centres outside the industry accredited sector that do centralise 'movement' in this way includes Lecoq School in Paris, various Commedia dell'art schools across Europe, and the American and British centres which teach Chekhov Technique (MICHA, MCCUK). However, the focus on the styles of, and approaches to, teaching movement and gesture that can be seen in the field of Movement for Actors is of considerable interest to this study particularly in relation to what will be discussed as Bing and Chekhov's form of play-enabling. Therefore notwithstanding the difficulties with the category of Movement for Actors, a consideration of certain studies into this field is useful to this research.

Significantly, British drama schools have historically drawn on approaches to actor training introduced by Saint-Denis, who was trained by, and worked

with Bing, Copeau and their other collaborators earlier in the twentieth century (see Robert Gordon 2006 and Mark Evans 2009 for an overview of Saint-Denis' influence in this respect). A number of the methods that Saint-Denis introduced to these schools, for example mask work and the limited uses of play, trace backwards through the French genealogy to the earlier work of Bing and Copeau. However, the techniques that Bing et al developed were to be used in a markedly different context by Saint-Denis and the later schools he was involved with and are, to a large extent, de-radicalised and watered down. A continuation of a patriarchal narrative history by Saint-Denis, and the way in which his own accounts of his work effectively writes Bing's crucial work and play methods out of the process, will be returned to, and the argument developed, in subsequent chapters. More recently Lecoq technique has been taught at many of the industry accredited drama schools (RADA, CSSD, and LAMDA) and as Lecoq's practice is also closely related to the work of Bing this is also of interest to this study. Chekhov's techniques are also being currently taught at E15 drama school in conjunction with Laban technique for actors by two teachers (Juliet Chambers and Tracy Collier) who train the actors in movement and at other institutions, although not always exclusively as movement for actors. Significantly this technique is also taught and applied to processes of theatre making (CSSD, Goldsmiths, Huddersfield, RSADA).

The literature related to this field of work remains sparse and the approach taken by the writers vary considerably. Only certain studies will be of use to this research but a brief overview of the literature will help map out the terrain. In general there are four main types of publication which come under this category (although not always exclusively): (1) Publications that address the pedagogic approaches of specific twentieth century practitioners related to the field (which often cross over with the practitioners linked to the categories of Mime, Total Theatre and Physical Theatres); (2) guides on specific techniques, skills or bodywork approaches (i.e. mask work, clowning, stage combat, Alexander technique, etc); (3) introductions and guides that movement teachers have written about their own approaches; and (4) studies on the wider field of

Movement for Actors in relation to the current practices in the training sector.

Examples of the first type of publication include Laban's writing on his own approaches on teaching movement, followed by the publication of Jean Newlove on her use of Laban Technique in the British context (1993, 2004) and then more recently, Barbara Adrian's publication on her approach to using Laban in North America (2008). Of course the publications by Newlove and Adrian filter Laban's approach through their own embodied practices, interests and other areas of training. The second type of guide on specific techniques is exemplified by the guides produced, for example Rudlin's handbook on *Commedia dell'arte* (1994) and Sears Eldridge's publication on working with mask improvisation (1996). The third type of text, where practitioners who teach movement to actors describe their own approaches, includes some seminal publications in the field, for example, Margarite Battye (1954), Nancy King (1971), Clive Barker (1977), and Litz Pisk (1982). These practitioners are obviously also drawing on, rebelling against, and transforming, aspects of their own training as practitioners so for example Barker's approach is heavily based on his training with Joan Littlewood including the way in which she, and Newlove, developed the use of Laban technique for actors along with a use of play. At the turn of the millennium, Lecoq's writings were published in English (2000, 2006) which can be seen as falling under the headings of Mime, Physical Theatre and Movement for Actors. In the same period, a number of younger practitioners wrote about the approaches they had developed and taught at drama schools, for example Marshall (2001) and Anne Dennis (2002). Many of these texts provide much needed guidance on, and discussion about, the various physicalised performance methodologies currently being used but frequently they do not offer much critical theorisation of the practice as their primary purpose is as practical guides or introductions. Whilst there is always a distinct view of the actor's body and mind relationship, and an ideology in their physical practice, it is often only implicitly acknowledged. For example, both Dennis and Marshall base their work on their own methodologies developed during their careers as theatre practitioners and pedagogues and structure their

publications around what they have identified as the key practical methodologies. However, Dennis provides more detailed discussion of earlier practitioners (for example Decroux and Barrault) in relation to her own training background. Although both authors supply detailed discussion on the various methods and exercises, neither provides detailed critical analysis of the practice or theories. Marshall (2001) interestingly refers to her experience of working with a wide range of performance styles and claims 'what I have discovered through all this diversity of experience is that the deep skills of the performer are similar, irrespective of the style of performance or the particular technical demands' (2001, p.xiv). Dennis, in contrast, is specifically addressing what she argues are the distinct needs of actors, which she opposes to her ideas about dance. As discussed Marshall explicitly states her view on an integrated body-mind relationship and its creative looping (ibid). Dennis, on the other hand, does not overtly state the model of the body-mind relationship that she is operating to, although her language often presents a rather dualistic model. However, some of the practitioner-writers do attempt to critically frame their work in more detail (such as Barker's earlier publication) and some of the analyses and arguments they present will be used in this study as appropriate.

There is a distinct lack of publications in the fourth category, those considering the wider field of Movement for Actors, the diversity of techniques currently used, the socio-historical context for these practices and related critical/ideological issues. In 2002 Nicole Potter published *Movement for Actors*, an anthology of essays addressing a diverse range of movement techniques and approaches used by practitioners in the USA. Each chapter provides a brief introduction to the theories underpinning the particular area of practice and often make links to various earlier practitioners. A brief introduction articulates Potter's realisation that 'the body is the instrument' to achieve an integration of '[d]iscipline and spontaneity, knowledge and instinct, technique and inspiration' (2002, p.ix) but does not provide a general discussion about the relationships between the different practices or the ideological and critical issues that are raised by these approaches. Recent practices are

covered, some better known outside of North America than others, and selected chapters address the work of earlier practitioners including Meyerhold, Chekhov and Laban and movement practices related to earlier modes of performance such as Commedia dell'arte, period dance and Restoration Comedy. Other essays explore mask work, clowning, the use of stillness and breath in performance, improvisation, working on camera and teaching post-modern choreography to actors. In addition to performance methodologies, this anthology also covers Alexander Technique and the Feldenkrais Method. Potter's anthology primarily addresses the practical uses of these techniques in isolation and provides a range of exercises. However, Mary Fleischner's chapter on 'Theatrical Stillness' considers techniques related to a variety of historical and recent physicalised practices. Jill Mackavey's chapter entitled 'Synergizing Internal and External Acting' addresses a key issue in relation to this area of practice but is primarily a mixture of anecdotal experience and the methods she uses to achieve what she describes as a 'synergy'. A chapter by Brad Krumholz, 'The Problem of Movement Theater', provides a basic critique of the quality of 'movement theatre' work in America but his arguments are inadequately developed in a very short chapter which is not related to specified methods or praxis-based theories.

In contrast Mark Evan's publication, *Movement Training for the Modern Actor* (2009) provides a technically and critically rigorous analysis of the field in the British context in relation to the industry accredited actor training courses. He addresses not only what he identifies as the three key practices used in these drama schools (Laban, Alexander and Lecoq's approaches and related techniques) but also considers them in relation to each other, a wider historical mapping of movement practices, and contextualises them in relation to critical ideas about the body. Crucially, he also considers what type of bodymind model these different practices are based on and the various issues this raises about forms of movement training and the actor's relationship to their embodied creativity. Evans argues that '...on the vocational side, movement training represents a method for translating a director's or writer's instructions into



movements which actors feel they can justify' (2009, p.5) and considers how this relates to the dominant theatre economy. This is helpful as it demonstrates that, whilst drama schools might teach practices which can be seen to trace back to the earlier work of Bing et al and Chekhov, the ultimate aim of the training is fundamentally different. Therefore, Evans is analysing the use of these embodied techniques in a theatrical context which, for the most part, positions actors as 'puppets' to directors and play texts, rather than as actors who are creative and authoring artists in Chamberlain's terms (2007). This study will address how Bing and Chekhov developed actor-centred, actor-as-artist, methods and how the centrality of embodied play, and the extension of this play, in their practice ultimately enabled more radical approaches to theatre-making than is currently employed in most accredited drama school professional training programmes. The contrast between Evan's historical analysis of the development of the British conservatoire system at the start of the twentieth century with the experiments in actor training and theatre-making that Bing and Chekhov were carrying out is startling in this respect. Evans' publication provides some excellent analysis and also raises a number of issues that are particularly relevant to this study which will be used, and developed or challenged, where appropriate in subsequent chapters. However, ultimately Evans' book has a markedly different focus to this research project as he is considering these physicalised methodologies within the restricted confines of British drama schools. Consequently, his study and certain other publications that are generally seen as *Movement for Actors* will be drawn on in relation to the work of Bing and Chekhov at various points, although their work cannot be considered under this heading for the reasons outlined above.

#### **4.7 Psychophysical Acting**

Stanislavsky (1863-1938), the legendary Russian actor and director, developed his own innovative System of actor training based on a Psycho-physical principle which recognises an integral connection between the human body and mind. This Psycho-physical principle relates to both what he defines

as the actor 'experiencing' performance (the inner emotional/spiritual work which relates to the mind, will and feeling) and the incarnation of the role (i.e. the external exploration of this role) (see Carnicke 2009, Whyman 2008). Carnicke describes Stanislavsky's Psychotechnique in the following way:

Stanislavsky grounds his System in Théodule Ribot's (1839-1916) psychophysical theories, which state that the mind and body are inseparable, and that emotions cannot be expressed without physical sensation. The psychophysical also extends into the spiritual realm for Stanislavsky, who borrowed exercises from Yoga in order to make the actor aware of the mind-body-spirit continuum of experience. As Stanislavsky writes in *An Actor's Work on Himself, Part 1*, "In every physical action there is something of the psychological, and in the psychological, something of the physical" (SS II 1989:258). The term, "psychotechnique," which often identifies the work of the System, reflects that belief.

(2009, pp. 222-223)

Both Carnicke (2009) and Whyman (2008) demonstrate how Stanislavsky's System was varied and dynamic.

Chekhov was introduced to the early form of the System, and its Psychophysical principles, by Sulerzhitsky and Stanislavsky at the MAT First Studio which he joined in 1912. Whilst Chekhov's approach is also completely built on a psychophysical model, his methods and ideas were to radically move away from Stanislavsky's and he was to integrate this notion of the psychophysical with various other techniques, different ideas, and forms of what I am terming embodied play. Importantly, in Chekhov's psychophysical practice the actor only uses highly imaginative physicality, vizualisation, and various other imaginative but external (or objective) techniques to trigger the inner life (sensations, feelings, emotions) of the actor. Crucially in his approach actors never directly use their own personal memories or are limited by their 'everyday' self or personality. Whybrow notes that in Chekhov's Psychophysical practice actors should never experience fusion or merging with their role but, in complete contrast to Stanislavsky's position, they should transform into a character or image entirely different to themselves (Whybrow 2008, p.28). The actor experiences the character's feelings, not their own. Again, in marked

contrast, Chekhov also believed the actor found a feeling of truth through a fully embodied engagement with their imagination but that this does not need to correlate to Naturalistic genre or representation which he believed was inartistic and restrictive (Chekhov 2005).

Meyerhold and Vakhtangov were also to develop their own forms of Psychophysical acting, but they too developed these approaches in contradistinction to Stanislavsky. As Bella Merlin argues, it was Chekhov who was to develop this psychophysical practice further in the twentieth century (2001, p.4). However, later in the twentieth century other practitioners developed their own forms of Psychophysical acting practice including Maria Knebel (1898-1985) and Anatoli Vasiliev (1942 - ) in Russia, Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999) in Poland, and Eugenio Barba (1936 -) in Denmark. Barba has argued that what he defines as Theatre Anthropology has identified a number of core pre-expressive principles of Psychophysical performance around the world. Despite the questionable premise that performance can be understood irrespective of the different cultural contexts that it is made in, and for, there is also an important difference between Barba's idea of pre-expressivity and the work carried out by Bing and Chekhov. Whilst actors using Bing and Chekhov's techniques may achieve what Barba identifies as certain pre-expressive qualities there is not always a division between the pre-expressive (i.e. practice carried out prior to something expressive) and the expressive in these approaches.

More recently another strand of psychophysical practice has been developed by Zarrilli which also blends this older principle with his very specific interest in intercultural performance. He explains that it draws 'on an intercultural set of paradigms and principles [...] It describes the in-depth process of psychophysical training via Asian martial arts and yoga that I have developed since 1976' (2009, p.1). Whilst this is actually very different to the earlier practices of Bing and Chekhov, Zarrilli does note some significant areas of overlap with his approach and the work of both Chekhov and Copeau (he

does not cite or acknowledge the work of Bing). He is particularly interested in Chekhov's work with 'material reality of energy as prana' (2009, p.20), his use of visual image and visualisation, and the way in which he develops psychophysical improvisation. Zarrilli also considers the way in which Copeau's work [and Bing's] was also operating in psychophysical terms (ibid, p.220). The application of this term in relation to the work of Copeau et al is helpful to this study as it confirms this area of convergence between the two case study artists. However, whilst Zarrilli goes on to argue that '[d]espite his continuous experiments Copeau remained unsatisfied with the result' (2009, p.25) this study examines the work that Bing carried out with the various schools and later companies (LC and CQ), along with a development of embodied play, which whilst it did not necessarily meet Copeau's personal ultimate aim in relation to text, did lead to the use of embodied play in more radical ways and to new forms of theatre-making.

It is also questionable whether using Psychophysical Acting as an overall term is helpful in relation to analyses of Chekhov's practice as it keeps his approach firmly within the Stanislavsky (master-teacher) matrix rather than seeing his work as a complex and significantly different strand of that theatrical genealogy. Whilst Chekhov borrowed very heavily from his early MAT/Studio teachers and colleagues, and can be seen viewed as part of this Russian tradition (see Gordon 1987, Merlin 2001, Pitches 2006 and 2011), this study argues that the nature of radical departure of his work from Stanislavsky is often obscured by viewing his work only through this matrix. Concurrently, this study is primarily concerned with Chekhov and Bing's use of play in respect to their use of a Psychophysical acting basis, and the relationship between the two warrants special and specific attention. Whilst Sulerzhitsky and Stanislavsky were interested in the idea of children's play, naïveté and proto-type improvisation they were not working with forms of play to the same extent as the case study artists. Therefore, the notion of Psychophysical acting, whilst extremely helpful to this study, will not be used as the overall identifying term for their practice.

## **5. Honing the Focus: Embodied Theatre**

In the recent British context these seven terms have ebbed and flowed in relation to fashion, practitioners and avant-garde movements. Although these categories are used to describe work, which share important practices and interests, they have emerged from different types of struggle against existing practices. Whilst many Dance-Theatre and New/Modern Mime practitioners have actively re-claimed the use of the spoken word which has frequently been denied to them, Total Theatre, Visual Theatre and Physical Theatres practitioners have often sought to escape a certain type of tyranny of the text and fought for the freedom to allow the performer's physicalised techniques to signify on their own terms. As has been discussed, the term Psychophysical Acting, in addition to linking back to Stanislavsky's practice in the early twentieth century, has also been broadened and the likes of Zarrilli now use this to consider a wider spectrum of performance, martial arts and yoga practice. The techniques covered by Movement for Actors have similarly changed and developed over time and now various approaches from 'outside' the commercial theatre sector have been included in the syllabus of many conservatoires, albeit to a limited extent. The boundaries between these various terms are blurred, the lineages represented by these different strands of this complex taxonomy intersect, cross-fertilise and converge. Whilst this study is opposed to simplifying, tidying-up or totalising this complex map of physicalised practice in the UK, it needs to hone the focus in order to provide some detailed critical analysis on the practices of Bing and Chekhov. As has been noted Total Theatre and Visual Theatre, as general terms, do not in themselves offer much to the analysis of the work of Bing and Chekhov in the context of this study and will therefore not be directly used. Certain practices, critical ideas and texts from areas of practice that are defined as Dance-Theatre and Movement for Actors, and Psychophysical Acting will be drawn on when useful, but the terms are again not particularly helpful in better articulating these areas of practice in overall terms. The problems related to Physical Theatres have discounted it

from being helpful in terms of identifying what was specific about the work of Bing and Chekhov and how their forms of embodied play operate in their approaches.

Removing these terms has helped to hone the focus in relation to the two case study artists but the need for an appropriate term which recognises the aspects of their work that I am addressing remains. McDermott's term of Embodied Theatre (2007), although problematic in the same way as Physical Theatre (one could argue that live human performance can never be disembodied), does perhaps offer a more useful starting point. I would argue that it has four main advantages. Firstly, his term moves away from the dichotomous debates surrounding physical theatre and recognises the multi-dimensional aspects of this type of performance which also extends out from the physical parameters of an actor's body. Secondly, the term embodied is perhaps more specific in a performance context than simply Physical Theatre. It relates to the presentation of ideas or beliefs in human (or animal) form, i.e. we personify it, or in this case perform it. This reflects the way in which the practices of Bing and Chekhov recognise the importance of movement and gesture as one of the ways in which meaning is created and shared. There is also a notion that this can relate to giving body to a spirit, a form of incarnation, which is relevant to both strands of practice (see *English Dictionary*, Penguin 2004, p.453). Thirdly, it is likely that McDermott chose this term as it can also be seen to converge with the more recent philosophical embodied mind thesis which suggests that the human mind is determined by the human body and vice versa (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson 1980/1999, Damasio 2000). This term then, like psychophysical acting, clearly states its opposition to a Cartesian dualistic perspective. Fourthly, the term itself is relatively new and therefore offers scope for discussion and development. In the light of this the term Embodied Theatre, and more specifically embodied play, will be used in this study as a way of recognising and analysing the areas of convergence between these two strands of practice. This will be returned to in more detail in subsequent chapters.

## 6. Literature

This study focuses on the materials available written by and about Bing, Copeau and their close collaborators and Chekhov that are published in English. As noted in the introduction, thus far there has only been a limited amount of Bing's notes and materials which have been translated into English. Again, materials can be found on both Bing and Chekhov in various scholarly fields reflecting the complexity of terminology and definition in the taxonomy previously discussed.

### 6.1. Suzanne Bing

A literature review specifically addressing studies on the actor training and theatre-making practices of Suzanne Bing is a rather brief affair. This does not, however, correlate to the amount of work she undertook as a theatre practitioner, or reflect the impact this work was to have on the genealogy of artists in France and other parts of the world in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Rather the lack of material which addresses Bing as the main subject reflects the way in which her story, as a female artist, and the way that she worked as the consummate collaborator, means that her story has been hidden behind other male historical narratives. Bing did not write and publish independently about her practice, but some of her writings are included in the VC notebooks and *registres* combined with Copeau's writings and those by their other collaborators, so Bing's entries only form a small proportion of these written records. In this context these texts need to be seen as belonging to a collective of artists, rather than simply reflecting Copeau's work, although care will be taken not to automatically conflate Bing's ideas with Copeau's dominant textual voice. Indeed, as this thesis argues, many of the ideas or visions about which Copeau writes, were ultimately embodied, developed (transformed), and delivered by Bing. Whilst Bing's written trace is modest, her embodied genealogy through French practice is considerable and the records of the exercises and approaches that she developed give us an opportunity to analyse

her practice. Selected entries from these publications are available in English in the English-language publication *Copeau: Texts on Theatre* edited and translated by John Rudlin and Norman Paul (1990). Other extracts from the central VC texts and various quotations from these sources have been translated for English language publications and other translations are available in the Copeau Archive developed by Rudlin and Paul and now based at the University of Kent at Canterbury. The plays which Bing translated and adapted in collaboration with Copeau and the Journal of the board of Copiaus which she wrote with Copeau and Léon Chancereau (1974), are only available in French at the present time.

Bing's absence in the historiographies of this group of practitioners is startling in relation to the significance of her work in relation to Mime, Physical Theatres, and Movement for Actor training and what I am terming Embodied Theatre. In certain earlier texts, such as Kurtz's biography of Copeau (1990), Bing's significance is effectively written out of the history of this group of artists as is the existence of the son she had with Copeau, or she is acknowledged only as an actress and at times an 'assistant'. This is mirrored by a large number of scholarly articles, chapters and books which focus on the work of Copeau. However, in contrast Bing's work is considered more fully in Barbara Leigh Kusler's study of the VC schools (1979) as she was the central pedagogue despite not being given the title of Director of the organisation. Felner's (1985) important study on New Mime also discusses Bing, although only in relation to this mode of performance due to the focus of her research. In Rudlin's (1986) study on Copeau as a director he references Bing as an actor and 'ideal teacher' (p. 43) but only very briefly considers what she was doing in relation to the development of the pedagogy of play. In his later publication (Rudlin and Paul 1990) Bing's significance in relation to teaching and acting is again recognised but to a limited extent. More recently her contribution has been much better acknowledged by Rudlin (2000) and a small number of other scholars in studies with a broader focus, or a focus on Copeau, (Evans 2006, Frost and Yarrow 2007 revised edition). The revision between Frost and



Yarrow's first and second edition of their survey of Improvisation is telling in this respect. In their first edition (1990) there are only nine minor references to Bing throughout the book whilst in the second edition (2007) they point out that she has not been fully credited for her work, and they revise their discussion to jointly credit Copeau and Bing for the development of this strand of French improvisation (20 pages). Importantly they also mention her by name in their section on games, which will be returned to later in the thesis. However, in general Bing's work has remained buried by traditional and patriarchal theatre histories that centre on the dominating figure of Jacques Copeau '*The Patron*'. Indeed this omission can also be seen in Murray and Keefe's introduction to physical theatres (2007), although Jonathan Pitches does discuss Bing's contribution briefly in Keefe and Murray's related reader (2007).

At present, the only English language publication that focuses specifically on the work of Bing is a valuable article by Thomas John Donahue (2001) which addresses the importance of her work with improvisation and mask, but does not focus on the development of an underlying principle of play or consider how this relates to processes of extended play as a process of theatre-making, which is central to this research. More recently Donahue (2008) has started to challenge the myth of singular artistic origin by writing on Copeau's collaborators during the VC's time in New York (1917-1919) and this study features Bing, Jovet and Dullin among others. However, Donahue's main interest in this publication is not the methods of play, but rather it addresses the way in which the contribution of a number of practitioners, supporters and funders enabled the development of Copeau's practice. Whilst this discussion about collaboration is long overdue and very useful in opening up the traditional male-dominated histories, it is also revealing that Donahue chooses not to include Bing in his chapter with Jovet and Dullin as 'disciples' of Copeau but rather considers her work in relation to her relationship to Copeau's as mistress/muse alongside his wife Agnès Thomsen Copeau, in a separate chapter entitled 'Two Women/Two Pillars'. Whilst Donahue acknowledges the importance of Bing's work, and points out that in the company the personal and

professional were completely intertwined, his particular framing of her role in this way risks another type of marginalization which is exacerbated by his suggestion that she was professionally naïve about the significance of her own work: 'The self-effacing Suzanne Bing remained in her lifetime most likely unaware that the training she offered to those young people had such a far-reaching impact' (2001, p.72). Surprisingly, Frost and Yarrow (2007) also attribute the neglect of Bing's work and significance to her own behaviour: 'Bing...has been unfairly neglected, due largely perhaps to her own diffidence and deference to Copeau's memory' (2007, p.26). This analysis will view these types of omission and absence from the alternative perspective of a critique of the traditional theatre historiographies which centre not only on a desire for singular and pure origins but also interface with the related issues of power, exclusion and gender. The explanations that Donahue, Frost and Yarrow give for this omission will also be evaluated in this context later in this study.

Helpfully Mark Evan's acknowledgement and discussion of Bing's work in his publication on Copeau (2006) does not consider her historical absence in these terms and provides some useful analysis that will be built on by this study. Marjaana Kurkinen's thesis *The Spectre of the Orient: Modern French Mime and the Traditional Japanese Theatre in the 1930s* (2000) provides a vital analysis of Bing's work on *Kantan* at the VC School and how this impacted on the development of modern mime, and this will be used in Chapter 5. Kurkinen notes Bing's absence in the historical studies of French mime, which she does not attribute to Bing's 'deference to Copeau' or 'self-effacing' personality, and argues that this absence needs to be addressed. Notwithstanding a different position on the reason for Bing's absence in traditional theatre and actor training histories, this project will also draw on Frost and Yarrow's work (2007) and in particular Donahue's more detailed studies on her practice (2001, 2008) and Kurkinen's work (2000) to develop an analysis of, and critical argument about, what Bing contributed and challenged in relation to actor training, performance and theatre making processes.

In addition, this research, as appropriate, traces through the various studies on, and other writings by, Copeau in order to gather material (often from the margins and faint traces visible underneath dominant male narratives and claims) on Bing. It will also draw on publications by her other close collaborators (e.g. Dullin, Jouvet, Howarth, Naumburg, Saint-Denis etc.), former students (e.g. Dorcy, Dasté, Dasté, Saint-Denis, Decroux, etc) and later practitioners who have built on, and transformed, the earlier work carried out by Bing (e.g. Barrault, Lecoq, etc.) in order to trace her embodied genealogy. Lastly, the study will draw on studies that have a broader scope but address the work of Copeau and Bing et al. directly or tangentially and various recent publications on devised theatre (Heddon and Milling 2006, Govan, Nicholson and Normington 2007, Mermikides and Smart 2010). Due to the paucity of material on Bing, this study will piece together various sources and an exploration of the actual techniques she developed in order to map her practice.

## **6.2 Michael Chekhov**

In contrast, there is now an extensive, and growing, field of literature addressing the practice of Chekhov, although this was not the case for the most part of the twentieth century and, as previously noted, until glasnost his works were not able to be published in his home country of Russia (Kirillov 2005, p.1). Fortunately Chekhov wrote about his approach to actor training and theatre making and in an impressively accessible, flexible and playful way. He also wrote articles on Stanislavsky's system and two autobiographies. Thanks to the hard work of his female collaborators Boner, du Prey and Straight, Chekhov had support in his attempts to write a book about his technique. During a period of convalesce in Latvia Chekhov started to try to find a way to articulate his ideas to actors in writing. He had realised that his ideas about embodied-imagination were in fact quite complex but understood that he needed to find an effective and playful way of transmitting them in writing which was an entirely different "language" to embodied experiential practice. During this period Boner gave him support and assistance in his attempts at writing about his technique, she

also helped to nurse Chekhov during his recovery. Boner was a doctor of philosophy, the author of an analytical work on the playwright Arthur Schnitzler and an anthroposophist. The combination of her interests and skills were clearly beneficial to Chekhov at this point. However, this material that Chekhov had initially hoped to publish in German (and which Boner had edited) did not meet his expectations and he decided against publishing at this stage (see Byckling 2000, Russian publication, cited by Kirillov in Chekhov 2005). But the project did not end there. Chekhov continued to write about his practice and sought to find the best way to present his material as a guide for practical use and this was to finally lead to his seminal workbook for actors *To The Actor*. Chekhov was supported in the next stage of this project by du Puy and Straight. However, this publication history was complex and as Chamberlain (2004 p.36) explains, after several attempts, his work was finally published in a reduced version in English as edited by Charles Leonard (1953) and then later re-edited by Mala Powers and Gordon as *On the Technique of Acting* (1991). In 2002 a revised and expanded version of *To The Actor* was published in English which encompasses the 1953 text in its entirety but includes other material that had not previously been available in English. It also presents the material differently to the previous editions. This study will use the 2002 edition, but will refer to *On The Technique of Acting* (1991) where appropriate.

Chekhov also wrote two autobiographies. The first, *The Path of the Actor*, was published in Russia just before he left in 1928 and covers the early years of his career as a theatre practitioner. His second, *Life and Encounters*, was published in North America in the 1940s which address the period after he left Russia and is able to cover the influence of anthroposophy on his work, a subject he could not write about freely in his earlier volume due to the prevailing political circumstances in Russia during the 1920s. Before his death Chekhov reportedly started working with Leonard on another book for directors and writers which Leonard published posthumously as *Michael Chekhov's To the Director and Playwright* in 1984. However, whilst this publication is said to be 'compiled and written' by Leonard some of the chapters are written versions of

Chekhov's lectures that were recorded in the 1950s (Chekhov 1992) and other writings or recorded conversations. Other chapters are evidently written by Leonard and it is hard to know if it totally reflects shared opinions with Chekhov, or whether at certain points it is his own position that he is articulating. Therefore, whilst this text will be used in this study, it will be approached with a level of caution as to the authoring of certain sections of material. Du Prey developed another publication on Chekhov's approach by taking short-hand notes of 14 classes that he gave to a group of professional actors in the New York Studio between November and December 1941 which she later edited and published as *Lessons for the Professional Actor* (1985). The earlier notes that she took of Chekhov's classes for the trainee teachers at Dartington Hall also constitute the material in what was published as Chekhov's *Lessons for Teachers of His Acting Technique* (2000) and is also available in the Dartington and American archives. This is an important text in relation to this particular research project as it reveals type of pedagogic approach that Chekhov developed, and modified, in tandem with his approach to actor training and directing. Powers, a later student of Chekhov's, also produced a written publication that accompanied a series of recorded lectures given by Chekhov in 1955 as *Michael Chekhov: On Theatre and the Art of Acting; The Six Hour Masterclass* (1992) available on cassette. Other materials written by Chekhov and his collaborators include the transcribed notes (taken again by du Prey) of a selection of classes given at Dartington and Ridgefield known as *The Actor is the Theatre*; these are available in the archives at Dartington and America but are not currently available in print. However, some previously unpublished papers have been made available in the special edition of *The Drama Review* (1983) which was devoted to the work of Chekhov. A biography of Chekhov was also published by Charles Marowitz (2004) who had been taught by Blair Cutting who had, in turn, been taught by Chekhov at both Dartington and Ridgefield; this will also be used where necessary in this study.

The literature written by other practitioners and scholars about Chekhov's work varies in relation to its purpose, scope, critical position and style. A

number of authors have written very useful studies of, and handbooks on, Chekhov's approach in relation to his time spent working with the cluster of Russian artists associated with the MAT/MAAT and its associated studios, in particular Sulerzhitsky, Stanislavsky and Vakhtangov. Gordon, the former head of the Michael Chekhov Studio in New York, published *The Stanislavsky Technique: A workbook for actors* (1987) which provides a very helpful analysis of not only Stanislavsky's practice but also considers the work of Sulerzhitsky, Vakhtangov and Chekhov thereby better articulating a nexus of practitioners working closely, but in distinctly different ways. Liisa Byckling has provided historical analyses of Chekhov's life and work which has been based on extensive archival research and she places his work very firmly within the Stanislavsky lineage; some of her work is available in English but at present her major publications are only published in Russian. Merlin's *Beyond Stanislavsky* (2001) addresses Chekhov technique in relation to the training she undertook in Russia in 1993 which also covered Stanislavsky's Method of Physical Actions and Active Analysis. Again, this is approaching Chekhov through this Russian lineage. More recently Jonathan Pitches has produced an interesting comparative study of Chekhov's approach in his publication *Science and the Stanislavski Tradition* (2006) and various articles. His research evidences the profound difference between Chekhov's practical and philosophical approach and Stanislavsky's but again views it as part of Stanislavsky's tradition. Although Gordon and Merlin's publications are primarily practical guides they do provide some very useful analysis of Chekhov's techniques and his overall approach. Whilst Byckling's work provides a much needed historical mapping of Chekhov's life and career, and a discussion of his work within broader Russian cultural studies, her central focus is not an analysis of the actor training. Pitches publication is the most analytical of this cluster of publications which views Chekhov through the matrix of the Stanislavsky heritage. However, as Gordon argues, Chekhov's work represents such a radical departure from Stanislavsky's and that viewing it from this perspective in isolation is somewhat limiting.

It is therefore helpful that there are a number of publications which, whilst acknowledging the significance of (and borrowing from) his earlier collaborations with Sulerzhitsky, Vakhtangov and Stanislavsky, consider his work in a broader, or at least alternative context. Chamberlain's text on Chekhov (2004) provides an insightful and rigorous overview of Chekhov's work, writings and life. Some of the analysis Chamberlain presents will be developed further in this study, in particular his position regarding the radicalism of Chekhov's practice and how this led to different systems of theatre-making. Chamberlain has also written a useful chapter in Hodge's (2000) anthology on actor training and an article which focuses on Chekhov's pedagogy and the influence of spirituality on his practice (2003). This useful body of research by Chamberlain will be built on and developed in this study. Another cluster of publications and papers by Daboo (2007) and Cynthia Ashperger (2008) provide an analysis of what they perceive as the use of non-self, or the transpersonal, in Chekhov's work drawing comparisons with Buddhist thought and practice. Daboo's article is particularly useful to this study as it provides an in-depth analysis of a selection of Chekhov's techniques while concurrently placing this within a critical context. More recently Daboo has written an article of Chekhov's time at Dartington (2012) which provides an important historiography on Chekhov's contribution to British actor training. Ashperger's book is in large part focussed on contemporary pedagogy of Chekhov technique and she offers an overview of the approach and exercises used by MICHA teaching staff. She also focuses on articulating the differences between Chekhov technique and Strasberg's Method, which she previously worked with and considers the use of Chekhov's work in the North American context. As discussed previously, Zarrilli (2009) considers Chekhov's work in relation to intercultural practice and specifically what he argues is a convergence with Asian martial arts and yoga practice. Yana Meerzon (2004) has written an article considering Chekhov's Hollywood film work using Prague-School aesthetics.

A number of practitioners have also published and filmed guides to their use of Chekhov technique. Felicity Mason, one of Chekhov's students at Dartington, produced a filmed class (1994) and Joanna Merlin, one of Chekhov's later American students, produced a DVD-Rom (2001) on using psychological gesture. In 2007 MICHA produced a series of Master classes taught by their faculty members on DVD. More recently, Floyd Ruhmor wrote a chapter in Potter's anthology *Movement for Actors* (2002) and Lenard Petit wrote a handbook on Chekhov Technique (2010). The Petit text does provide some commentary and analysis on Chekhov, and is significant to this particular study as he represents an embodied point of contact between both traditions; he initially trained with Decroux, who had been a student of Bing's, and then went on to train with Blair Cutting, who had been taught by Chekhov. Significantly in this respect, Petit greatly emphasises the playful principle in Chekhov technique and has developed the practice working with Chekhov Clown. David Zinder (2002) and McDermott (DVD-rom and accompanying notes 1995) both discuss how they use Chekhov technique in relation to their own work as practitioners and actor-trainers, combined with other sources of inspiration and their invented techniques. Petit, Zinder and McDermott are of particular interest to this study as they all place a specific emphasis on the playful dimension of Chekhov's work. Chekhov's work and approach are also addressed in a number of broader historical studies of performance. Of particular interest to this study is Frost and Yarrow's consideration of Chekhov (second edition 2007 only) specifically because they start to trace correlations between areas of his work with other, non-Stanislavsky based, practitioners. As discussed earlier in the chapter Chekhov is discussed in Murray and Keefe's (2007) introduction to physical theatres and the appendix on Psychological Gesture is included in the accompanying reader by Keefe and Murray (2007). The chapter that McDermott provides (2007) in this reader arguing for an Embodied Theatre is of central importance to this study. Lastly, there are two films in English that address Chekhov: a documentary on Chekhov's time at Dartington which contains film footage and a series of interviews produced by the MCCUK (Dir. Martin Sharp, 2002); and another documentary (Dir. Frederick



Keeve, 2002) which looks at the work of both Chekhov and Shdanoff.

This study will contribute to this field of literature by adding to Donahue's, Frost and Yarrow's and Kurkinen's work on Bing and in specific terms addressing the way in which she developed a form of embodied play and how this related not only actor training but also play-enabling and ultimately theatre-making in relation to her pedagogy and directing at the schools. Consequently it will provide a new form of feminist historiography in relation to this French strand of practice. In addition it will add to the growing field of analysis of Chekhov's technique but will provide an alternative to the Stanislavsky matrix by addressing in very specific terms his use of embodied play. Crucially, this thesis will consider how this can be used to expand the current discourse on play in relation to physical performance. Lastly, it will address two strands of practice that have been placed under Murray and Keefe's expansive term of Physical Theatres providing a much more detailed analysis of how they might relate to / contrast with each other, and how this might help us develop a broader understanding of embodied play.

## **7. Writing about Embodied Theatre**

There is an obvious contradiction in an attempt to write about Embodied Theatre, using one mode of communication to discuss a totally different one. Visual and aural sources have also been used for this research wherever possible and written materials produced by the practitioners and their collaborators/students are an important resource. The ideas and practices of the practitioners featured in this study were not static; rather they changed over time and will often present contradictions or rejections of previously advocated methods. This returns us to Foucault's description of genealogy as something complex and layered, operating on a 'field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times' (Foucault 1977A, p.39). In the case of Bing in particular this will also require an analysis of the embodied approach/techniques itself in order to glean

her position and at times a level of creative conjecture, as she was often pulling together various different strands of work and technique, synthesising it in Chekhov's terms, and there are many layers present (or markedly absent) in the accounts. In this context, the thesis will also present the hypothesis that the practitioners featured assume the role of collective 'authors' or 'initiators of discursive practices' in Foucault's terms (1977A, p.131). Developing Foucault's argument this thesis will consider whether the praxis methodologies / aesthetics of Bing could be considered in place of a series of 'texts'. With regards to Bing's work we also need to remember that these interpersonal and embodied experiences and systems of training are often shared and transmitted through physical play or demonstration, body to body contact, felt-knowledge, improvisation and observation not only through written texts and lectures. This study acknowledges the more complex and in-direct lines of descent whereby the techniques, and specifically the form of embodied play, have been passed on from Bing through embodied play-enabling, direction and co-performing (and of course transformed) between chains of students/teachers, actors/directors and collaborator/collaborators for a period of almost a century. In other words Bing's ideas and practices were handed down by the practice and writings of others (in this case Copeau and her other male students and collaborators). The younger practitioners then rigorously experimented and interrogated physical practices and ideas of embodiment, adding to this mode of performance over time to collectively develop a broad discipline. Foucault argues that the significant contribution of initiators of discursive practices is that their work produces the 'possibility and the rules of formation of other texts' (Foucault 1977A, p. 131) and in this case we are not looking purely at written text, but other developments of embodied practice. Perhaps then, this genealogy might reflect praxis-based discursive practices which has at different times offered rules of formation for other praxis-based explorations. For example Craig, Copeau and Bing's re-discovery of the mask can be seen to have provided some of the 'rules of formation' for many subsequent practitioners and arguably fed into what Murray and Keefe (2007) term the Physical Theatres continuum. However, this is not to imply that the subsequent

practitioners must always follow these rules of formation developed by Bing and Chekhov in an immobile fashion. For example Decroux's use of the approach he learnt from Bing is very different to the practice that the Dasté's developed with Bing's help and subsequently shared with Lecoq. Foucault's discussion of 'the insertion of discourse into totally new domains of generalization, practice and transformations' (Foucault 1977A, p.134), is of interest here and this study will consider if this could include Embodied Theatre practices.

The current focus on the 'product' created by companies who work under Murray and Keefe's umbrella term of Physical Theatres (and the smaller number of companies I am defining as Embodied Theatre) needs to be understood in political-commercial terms. British commercial theatre has recently appropriated aspects of physicalised performance, generally involving co-productions with companies working in the field, rather than investing in in-house productions, however, this interest has not automatically resulted in a full understanding of the training, exploratory, devising and rehearsal methodologies used by practitioners in this field, arguably because this would involve considerable changes to organisational practices. Consequently only these commercial end products, the canonical productions, have been absorbed into the mainstream. As Lloyd Newson argued: 'People want the result without making the changes in the bureaucracy that are necessary to achieve this. You can't just get the product without changing the system' (Newson in Tushingham 1994, p.50). This view is supported by David Glass, who claims that this approach results in a superficial engagement with these creative practices: 'mainstream theatre sees something interesting, say they see a Complicite show, one of my shows, or a DV8 show, and they take a bit from the top, the cream of it [but] they don't understand where it comes from' (Glass in Drijver 1998, p.15). Placed in a broader context, physicalised performance practice still appears to struggle within, or resist, commercialised theatre structures. In addition to their less reverential approach to text-based theatre, the processes used to generate performance material generally employ play/improvisation and devising or staging methods which usually require longer

and differently structured and focussed rehearsal periods than is generally provided for in British mainstream theatres, or by funding bodies. This becomes a serious issue for this practice and McBurney points out 'when one talks about the political nature of the work I think you've also got to talk about the politics of the imagination' (in Tushingham 1994, p.22). This study will be looking in detail at 'where it comes from' in relation to the practices of Bing and Copeau and will consider what the politics of their types of embodied play might be.

This chapter has defined Bing and Chekhov's embodied play techniques in relation to the broader field of physicalised performance in order to enable a more detailed and specific analysis. The evaluation of the wider web of related taxonomies of performance and the literature review have also revealed which fields of literature are useful to this study and identified some significant gaps in scholarship. A specific form of genealogy has been developed to address the different forms of embodied play developed by Bing et al and Chekhov, and to consider the position of the artists and their work, the acts of cross-fertilisation, and the way in which they are represented or made absent in existing actor training/making histories. The chapter has argued that the notion of Embodied Theatre, and in the case of this study, embodied play, might be better suited, to this area of practice and the next chapter will further this argument in relation to the chosen artists.

## Chapter 2: Mapping Embodied Play Methods

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### 1. Introduction

This chapter argues that while the embodied acting techniques developed by the case study practitioners are crucial to their work, an analysis of their wider practice and ideological standpoints reveals that it is the development and application of these techniques within, what I am terming broader networks of embodied play, that facilitates a specific, sustained and deeper imaginative embodied practice. This chapter will start by tracing out the play terrain in relation to actor training and present the argument for expanding the currently dominant notion of play which tends to centre on Lecoq's more recent notion of *Le Jeu* in relation to the field defined by Murray and Keefe (2007) as *Physical Theatres*. It will consider Chekhov's form of embodied play, and will re-consider Bing's contribution to the French tradition of play. A mapping of their terminology and conceptions of play will be compared and considered in relation to Lecoq's term of *Le Jeu*. Selected critical frames will be introduced in order to facilitate the analysis of play and the influence of avant-garde pedagogy will be analysed. What the practitioners considered to be the potentiality of play will be analysed as will the question of whether there are pre-requisites for play. The way in which both strands of embodied play practice were also attracted to playful modes, genres and styles of performance will be examined. This will be followed by a reflection on the way in which their respective play practices also took place outside of formal 'work' boundaries. Risky play, dark play and psychodynamics will also be analysed by means of selected examples. The chapter will conclude with an overview of Bing and Chekhov's embodied play to prepare a ground for the detailed examples that will follow in subsequent chapters.

## **2. From Embodied Theatre to Embodied Play**

The taxonomy of categories and definitions, with a consideration of the related clusters of practice, has mapped out a context for an analysis of Bing and Chekhov's work. Whilst McDermott's term (2007) of embodied theatre seems to better represent the complexity of their practice because this study looks in detail at how they specifically utilise play in their forms of actor training this definition now needs to be considered in relation to this aspect of their methods. Play is a notoriously slippery social and cultural activity to define and is of interest to researchers and practitioners in many different fields. Schechner, as a performance theorist, notes the different 'genres' of play as 'play, games, sports, art and religion' (1993, p.42) and has considered these different manifestations of play in some detail. This issue of defining play will be returned to, but at this point it is important to note that I am addressing play being carried out by adult (frequently teenage / young adult) actors in a training, making and performance context. This means that it is a form of play that relates directly to art practice, or culture creation in Huizinga's terms (1950), taking place in professional training programmes in post-industrial societies.

The methods developed by Bing et al and Chekhov drew extensively on 'games' and play frames. However, these games are very varied in nature, not static, and are not always concerned with the notion of a winner or loser. The 'rules', 'frames' or 'grounds' can be flexible (generally established by the play methods the actors have learnt) which can be internally or externally imposed, which change, are broken, dropped or re-invented. These were developed for actors in relation to their overall methods, but both Bing et al and Chekhov also directly borrowed and transformed the games that children play in a broader social context. However, their practices do not simply use theatre games as 'warm ups' as has become common practice in certain theatre training approaches, or in a more contained manner in a making process. Their methods of play can, but do not always, involve games in the more conventional sense. Similarly, these forms of embodied play are intimately connected to

performative improvisation, but they are not always exactly the same. Frost and Yarrow's definition of improvisation in a theatrical context is useful:

the skill of using bodies, space, all human resources, to generate a coherent physical expression of an idea, a situation, a character (even, perhaps, a text); to do this spontaneously, in response to the immediate stimuli of one's environment, and to do it *à l'improviste*: as though taken by surprise, without preconceptions.

(2007, p.4)

However, sometimes the play can be even freer than this with a less defined outcome. For example, Chekhov suggests that actors play with Objective Atmosphere in a way which at times provides the loosest frame for a playful and embodied 'experience' rather than any kind of concrete outcome, or set expression, in some senses it is more like someone 'playing with their hair'. Their use of children's games did not always directly lead to a coherent expression. Nor does Chekhov's use of visualisation, as whilst it shares important features with improvisation as described by Frost and Yarrow, it does not always lead to a coherent physical expression of an idea, or not in a quick, clear or visibly perceivable manner to someone other than the actor themselves. Concurrently, the forms of, what I am terming extended play, that Bing et al and Chekhov developed also trained the actor how to create through play, not just to use play to interpret existing play texts. These methods of embodied play are also not just contained in isolated exercises but form a principle in all aspects of their practice and in public performance. Chekhov did not describe his approach as utilising a method of play and/or games in a direct manner (although as we shall see he continually refers to these terms and principles for his methods), rather this thesis is retrospectively using this term in order to better analyse how his practices work.

The play methods developed by Bing et al and Chekhov both require, and in turn provide, a very specific type of embodied playful awareness in training, character creation, performance and engagement with texts and stimuli materials. It enables and combines, in McDermott's terms, 'the body, the imagination, the emotions and the voice' (2007, p.204). This extends the

existing discourse on play by providing an analysis of the different, but related, network of embodied play methods present in Chekhov's approach and re-considers the specific contribution that Bing made to the play methods of the VC, LC and CQ. Bing et al and Chekhov often had different aims and intentions in their work, yet the way in which they developed their embodied play practices, and what these practices fed into, demonstrates a nexus point between their methods. This convergence obviously needs to be seen in its socio-cultural and historical context and the prevalent ideas of the early twentieth century, which they shared to some extent, but it also represents a curious moment of historical co-incidence as these practitioners never worked or trained together. In the light of the messy and partially submerged nature of this genealogy, it is crucial to demonstrate how these case studies exemplify highly skilful, magpie tactics of borrowing, taking and transforming the practices found through collaboration and cross-fertilisation with others, along with their own level of invention that fed into their respective embodied play methodologies.

The forms of embodied play developed by Bing and Chekhov situate their practice in a creative and embodied relational framework. Play socialises relationships and engagements in general, but Bing et al and Chekhov's uses of play also draws on the ways in which the actor experiences themselves in relation to their imagination and inner life, and also to all the experiences which can seem external to them. Concurrently, both forms of embodied play develop, draw on, and highlight the use of notions of energy and connection between actors, between actors and audience, and between actors and the world 'outside' themselves. Again, McDermott's term is useful here and he argues that: '[t]his performance also has a relationship beyond its own body-in-the-space and is in energetic dialogue with other performers, the design environment and light, and the audience. This whole energy field is a system in constant flux as it relates to itself and organises the system of emotions, impulses, intellect and storytelling' (2007, p.204). In this context it is not surprising that both strands of practice draw on observation of, and imaginative



and energetic engagement with, not only other people, but also nature (trees, plants, and other natural forms), the elements, weather, forms and animals. The embodied imagination is fed by the relationship *between* people, energies, elements and forms, which feeds into Marshall's (2001) 'feedback loop'. The relationship between the actor and these, and other, external dimensions feed, alter and develop the actor's imaginative inner life. The actor then sends this imaginative work and energy back out (Radiates) into performance, and the world, as a type of reciprocity and exchange. In this sense it is Relational in Buber's (2004) sense of the term, in that the meaning and value is based in these relational exchanges based on mutuality and reciprocity. The capacity to engage in this type of embodied and relational play is supported by the ensemble practice that Bing and Chekhov developed to help actors be engaged, open (or openhearted in Chekhov's terms) and available. This is vital if they are to be ready to receive and respond to new (and more spontaneous) ways of being, embodying, playing and relating to ideas, material and others. This also renders them open to chance, accident and discovery as ensemble and relational play leads to less determinable outcomes. The ability to give out (or to Radiate in Chekhov's terms) to the other actors and the audience is also key and forms this dynamic interplay with receiving/being open. The dynamic interplay of being open/receiving and being able to give out/back to others underpins their ensemble practice and these forms of play and achieves what Chekhov defines as Contact. This in turn helps actor develop a heightened awareness 'in the moment' which is crucial for the improvisation which is inherent in all forms of play. Consequently development of this 'internal' imaginative life is seen as being inextricably related to the 'external' and in this respect it is also an anti-individualistic form of play (although neither strand of play sought to prohibit the development of actors as individuals or wanted them to be subsumed within an ensemble). For Buber (2004), there is a spiritual dimension in the relational exchange, and an element of this can be seen to be embedded in the embodied play under discussion. A sense of the actor's work in relation to what Chekhov defines as the 'Whole' (of the ensemble, the selection of characters, the overall creative production, the composition, etc.)

rather than being absorbed only in their individual role/work, is also developed in both his, and the French form of embodied play. This helps to avoid self-centred (individualistic) work and demands that the actor remain open and engaged for the various relational exchanges that exist in this form of embodied play.

Whilst Mc Dermott's term proves very useful for an articulation of these play practices, it is necessary to add to his description to clarify the context of this study. The forms of embodied play that evolved in both strands of practice centred on the transformation of the actor into a character, or being, markedly different from their everyday selves. As this analysis will demonstrate, this is a distinctive mimetic and fantasy element of both strands of play which operates very differently to the forms of play that are based on the use of actor's personal memories, personality, ego, or persona. Of course this should be considered in its historical context as both forms of play were developed prior to the emergence of post-modern and post-dramatic performance and did not share the same aims or intentions with these later artists. However, it clearly distinguishes certain clusters of contemporary practice that can be seen as inheritors of these genealogical strands of play from other forms of physicalised, or Physical, Theatre. This also adds another dimension of the relational as the actor plays with the relationship of difference between themselves and their character and play is used as an important trigger mechanism to aid this transformation. To some extent it can also be seen as a moralistic or spiritual perspective, as Leabhart argues '[f]or Copeau and his associates, art and morality were closely allied, and good art could not be produced by self-centred and egotistical people' and the desire to escape this is what led them to centralise improvisation [and what I am terming play] in their practice' (1989, p.25).

### **3. Tracing the Play Terrain**

Play is central to many forms of performance; Murray and Keefe (2007) even claim that it could be considered a possible 'origin' of all performance.

Whilst there are many different uses of play and games in actor training and theatre making, there are very few studies which analyse play as an underlying performance principle across different genealogical strands of performance practice. Frost and Yarrow argue that whilst closely related to improvisation, '[t]heories of play, and the usefulness of games in actor training, are major studies in themselves' (2007, p.125). The revised edition of their (1990) study on improvisation is usefully amended to consider Chekhov's practice but they do not address his techniques in their section on games (2007).<sup>3</sup> Robert Gordon (2006) provides a survey of the different strands of the use of improvisation and games in performer training and devising processes including the work of: Copeau and Lecoq in France; Viola Spolin and Neva Boyd in Chicago; and later Barker after Littlewood and Keith Johnstone after George Devine and Saint-Denis in England.<sup>4</sup> However, Gordon does not address Chekhov in this context. Murray and Keefe refer to Chekhov's technique in their publications on Physical Theatres (2007) and whilst both the term itself, and the use of this in relation to Chekhov's technique, is problematic, the way in which they have placed his practice under this expansive term does reflect how certain aspects of his work converge with those of the early French play practices developed by Bing, Copeau and the later form of play taught by Lecoq and his collaborators. Unfortunately, Murray and Keefe (2007) do not address the practice of Chekhov in relation to their analysis of play in their publication. Subsequently, what his practice may bring to this area of practice and scholarship, or how it may challenge and expand an understanding of embodied play, most often based on Lecoq's notion of *Le Jeu*, has not been adequately considered.

Of equal significance is the need to re-consider the development of embodied play methods developed by Bing which further dismantles the mythic and paternal history of the VC lineage. As noted previously it was Bing who

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<sup>3</sup> The first edition only gives two minor references to Chekhov. However, his work is discussed extensively in the revised edition (17 pages) in their section of 'Traditional' Improvisation. They also have a number of sections on Chekhov technique elsewhere in the publication.

<sup>4</sup> Johnstone was inspired by the work of George Devine who had been a student and then an assistant to Saint-Denis when he had moved to Britain. Johnstone published *Theatre Impro* in Britain in 1981.

was pivotal in linking the strands of work from the start of the VC company/schools to the later projects of LC and CQ, through her close work with various collaborators and students. As Rudlin acknowledges, whilst Copeau had a powerful vision of the centrality of play it was Bing who consistently developed the form of embodied play and the skills in play-enabling to train actors in this technique, and it was these methods that she and her former students and collaborators took with them to LC and CQ: 'As much as [Copeau] believed in *laissez jouer*, however, he could not bring himself to let it happen without absenting himself altogether. Bing could do it for him, but in the end he let her go too. In 1929 she, and the Copiaus, were indeed left to their own, separate, devices' (2000, p.75).

Frost and Yarrow (1990/2007), Gordon (2006) and Evans (2009) all point out that a limited use of theatre games, and certain types of improvisation, have now been absorbed into industry accredited drama training in Britain and in some contexts are seen as 'traditional' practice. Evans (2009) also recognises the importance of play in relation to his study on movement practices in a sample of British Drama Schools. He argues that he saw evidence of 'delight, of play and playfulness' in the movement classes he observed and 'play and playfulness in movement have increasingly become a key part of a vision for European theatre that is vital, therapeutic, liberating and challenging' (2009, p.174). However, caution and clarification is needed here as the use of games, improvisation and playful movement training in traditional drama schools is frequently contained and segregated as they do not draw on a play as a principle in all areas of their syllabi, or extend these forms of play into a training for processes of theatre-making in its broader sense. This reflects the aim of preparing students for work in the mainstream professional theatre sector in Britain which still, for the most part, segregates movement work and limits the use of play. Therefore we need to clearly differentiate between on the one hand a limited, contained or mechanistic use of improvisation and games in industry accredited training, and on the other, professional practice and approaches that are built on embodied play as primary principle. The latter was, and remains, a

far more radical practice which still actively resists other aspects of theatre training offered in traditional conservatoires, and it is this form of embodied play with which I am concerned in this study.

#### **4. Expanding the Notion of Play**

Whilst Lecoq's notion of *Le Jeu* as a principle of play in performance and training is now widely recognised within the larger field of highly physicalised performance, it is often only related to his own approach and traced back to the earlier work of Copeau et al in France which had been based on this same principle (Felner 1985, Frost and Yarrow 1990, 2007, Lecoq 2000, 2006, Chamberlain and Yarrow 2002, Murray 2003 and Murray in Hodge 2010). In this context, the work of Chekhov, whilst frequently acknowledged as highly playful and dependent on improvisation, is somewhat marginalised or overlooked in this existing discourse on play. Subsequently what his practice may contribute to this area of practice and scholarship, or how it may challenge or expand certain understandings of play, has not been adequately considered.

Gordon argues that at the core of Lecoq's practice was 'Copeau's notion of play as first principle of the dramatic imagination' (2006, p.214). Although there are differences between the practices developed by Bing and Copeau and the later work of Lecoq (Wright 2002), they share this notion of first principle and a large number of other techniques and approaches (Chamberlain 2002) there was also a web of genealogical connections between these artists. Lecoq had first undertaken theatre training with Claude Martin (previously a student of Dullin, a founder member of the VC) with whom he practised 'mime improvisations' and was subsequently invited to work with Marie-Hélène and Jean Dasté in the late 1940s (Lecoq 2000, pp.4-6). Marie-Hélène and Jean Dasté (Copeau's daughter and son-in-law) were close student-collaborators with Bing and Copeau and they introduced Lecoq to mask work and the forms of embodied play they had encountered at VC, LC and CQ. However, it had been many years before when Bing, Copeau, Juvet and Dullin started to

experiment with developed forms of improvisation and embodied play in the very first years of the VC. They wanted actors to achieve what they had identified as a 'naturalness' and 'authenticity' of movement and response that they had seen in children's play and the work of the craftsperson (Kusler 1979, Copeau 1990) in contradistinction to what they perceived as the 'artificiality' or 'falseness' of much of the acting they witnessed in early in the twentieth century. By 1915, Bing and Copeau were experimenting with various games and forms of play with a group of children at the Club de Gymnastique Rhythmique in Paris and whilst the company was in New York (1917-1919) Bing was fortunate to work with Naumburg at her progressive educational school where creative play was placed at the heart of their curriculum and approach to pedagogy. In addition to this fascinating process of cross-fertilisation with Naumburg, Bing was also experimenting with the use of play with VC actors and their children whilst they were living and working in the United States of America. The VC School (1920-1924) and the later approaches to training in Burgundy after 1924, also centralized both improvisation and games in their development of play. A core part of Bing's practice also involved teaching the actors what I am terming extended play, as part of their training. This enabled a more developed use of play to generate performance material and small-scale productions within the school. In addition to being a core part of the syllabus the students were also encouraged to use extended play to generate their own projects based on the methods they were being taught by Bing and her collaborators (Copeau 1990, p.47). Later, this play principle and related methods were used to make new forms of theatre for public audience, such as the VC/LC attempts to develop a New Improvised Comedy (a form of contemporary Commedia dell'arte) and the later work of CQ.

Lecoq's *Le Jeu*, displays marked similarities with the earlier form of embodied play developed by Bing, Copeau and their other collaborators. Frost and Yarrow's description of Lecoq's complex, and hard to define, term is helpful in this context:

Lecoq uses [Le Jeu] to signify the energy that is shared between performers on stage and in rehearsal – the ball that the game is played with – which is why for him improvisation is very much a matter of physical activation. ‘Play’ also means the *inter-play* of this activity, emphasising the relationships which spark off or create new combinations [...] Other appropriate shades of meaning include the hint of ‘brining into play’, and the sense of ‘possible movement or scope’ as the degree of play in a bicycle chain, for instance. This picks up another useful angle, namely the balance between freedom and restraint: ‘play’ here indicates a fruitful tension within reasonably precise limits.

(2007, pp. 87-88)

Murray notes that this is a highly complex and hard to define term, however, he identifies three main strands related to this concept: theatricality, improvisation and spectators (2003, p.67). Whilst not wishing to conflate Lecoq’s Le Jeu with Bing and Copeau’s earlier use of a play principle and methods, or Chekhov’s form of embodied play, it appears that there is a significant area of convergence in the overall placement of play at the centre of their different practices. Related to Lecoq’s notion of Le Jeu are his two other terms or dispositions; Disponibilité and Complicité. The first indicates an availability, openness, readiness and acceptance in the actor and the practice. Frost and Yarrow suggest ‘we can usefully borrow this French word to suggest the condition the improviser seeks to discover and maintain’ (2007, p.197) and it can certainly be applied to the practices of Bing et al and Chekhov. Du Prey explains that Chekhov used the term ‘awareness’ which requires ‘being absolutely open to what is going on, so that it flows into you and takes you and lifts you and moves you’ and notes that this must include every part of your being ‘body, soul and spirit’ (1978, p10). Murray and Keefe define Complicité as a form of complicity or connection between the actors, i.e. ensemble practice, and between actors and the audience (2007, p.146-147) and explain how play must in this respect work as a dynamic between the actor and spectators (ibid, p.146). This idea was shared by Bing and Copeau and after the move to Burgundy they were able to explore this extensively (Copeau, 1990) and similarly Chekhov argued that the ‘audience is the co-creator of the performance’ (2002, p.146) and that the actors must always strive to make a contact with their fellow players and their spectators. Like Bing et al and Chekhov, Lecoq also argues that an actor must

discover and explore the differences between their everyday self and their character, indeed he argues 'I am always afraid the student will fall back on personality, in other words talk about themselves, with no element of genuine play. If character becomes identical with personality there is no play' (2000, p.61). He explains that through mask work '[t]hey have learned not to play *themselves* but to play *using* themselves' (ibid, author's emphasis). This relates to his ideas about being both fully involved in performance, but also being able to have a level of distance, which as this analysis will demonstrate were also crucial aspects of Bing et al and Chekhov's forms of embodied play.

However, there are also some significant differences between the methods of play developed by Bing et al and Chekhov, and Lecoq's form of Le Jeu. For example, Lecoq trains actors to use a preliminary process that he calls Replay which involves 'reviving lived experience in the simplest possible way' (2000, p.29) prior to an application of a freer form of Play. Whilst Bing also drew on observation, movement analysis and sought simplicity of movement, as her work with noble mask demonstrated, it was not always such a prescribed process. There were clearly times when the actors were engaging in Play without a form of Replay in Lecoq's terms. Chekhov also uses observation but at times he suggests that actors work more from their imagination. His practice also encourages actors to play with the essence of movement and form, however for Chekhov this is never without a level of imaginative expression. To some extent actors also move between these two poles in the process of embodied play that Chekhov developed. It is also possible to identify some differences between the way in which Lecoq enabled play and the earlier work of Bing and Chekhov. Wright notes whilst Copeau sought to balance and harmonise the experiences of his acting students, often living in residential communities, Lecoq in marked contrast used a form of 'via negativa' 'where the teacher restricts comments to the negative, namely what is *inappropriate* and unacceptable, thus forcing the student to discover what is *appropriate*, whilst avoiding being prescriptive' (2002, p.72). Arguably, the lead teacher, in terms of developing a coherent and consistent style of play-enabling in the French



context was Bing (Donahue 1998 and 2008, Rudlin 2000) and as this study will demonstrate her style seems more similar to Chekhov's approach and those developed by Naumburg and Montessori which although they are self-determining for the student do not work through a process of *via negativa* as such. Chekhov, as Chamberlain points out, 'had the reputation of being a very gentle teacher who challenged his students but did not torment his students or overly criticize them' (2004, p.28). However, the fact that these earlier practitioners did not use *via negativa* does not imply that their approach did not require discipline and records indicate that both Chekhov and Bing demanded a great deal from their students. Notwithstanding the differences between Lecoq's delivery of *Le Jeu* and the forms of embodied play developed by Bing et al and Chekhov, the subsequent analysis presented in the thesis will demonstrate that there is a fundamental connection between them all in terms of using embodied play as a core principle and a way of training actors not only discrete skills but to become creators and makers of theatre. What these differences imply is that a different term may be more appropriate to acknowledge this shared approach but be able to contain, and acknowledge, the differences between them.

## **5. Chekhov's Embodied Play**

Whilst Chekhov's playful approach and use of games have been addressed by some authors (Gordon 1985, p. 14, Black 1987, p.80, Merlin 2005, p.200), this has frequently been viewed simply as a way of optimising specific techniques, exercises or possible stagings, rather than a crucial aspect of his entire approach to theatre-making. Chekhov never presented his methods in rigid manifestos, and he claimed that they 'are not absolute laws' (Chekhov 1985, p.135) but rather explained that the exercises and technique always require a level of playful engagement and experiential learning. As Chamberlain has pointed out, 'the basic principles of the technique will allow as many variations and creations as there are creative individualities' (2000, p. 86). Chekhov's practice is renowned for being radically actor-centred and his

technique fundamentally challenged the opinion that the actor existed merely to service the director's interpretation of the playwright's vision. Instead Chekhov placed them at the centre of the creative process. Whilst not named as such by Chekhov, the current of embodied play in his technique extends this creative empowerment of the actor as it requires teachers and directors to relinquish a level of control in the process as, like the actors themselves, they cannot always pre-determine or control the results of this play. This is not to say that Chekhov, and other teachers and directors using his techniques, cannot carefully frame, control and develop the forms of play (and select and shape the material generated) but fundamentally this method trusts that actors can make exciting discoveries for themselves through playful embodied trial and error. In turn this requires a specific set of skills and attitudes from the play-enabler and a willingness to give the actor a level of ownership of their work. It also allows a freedom for the actor to develop what Chekhov terms the actor's Creative Individuality. This can also potentially provide the actor with some level of ownership of their work as artists in their own right. Importantly, Chekhov had explored, discovered and developed these play methods through his own practice as an actor (like Bing) and consequently had an embodied understanding of them and was arguably less threatened by the notion of giving creative power and freedom to actors through the use of these techniques/approaches.

Chekhov talks extensively about his acting techniques operating as 'games' in *To The Actor* (2002), and repeatedly stresses that they should be played with, which he points out requires a light touch. He discusses two of his key techniques, the Imaginary Body and Imaginary Centre (which can be used together or independently), within this very specific methodological frame:

Consider creating and assuming a character as a kind of quick and simple game. "Play" with the imaginary body, changing and perfecting it until you are completely satisfied with your achievement. You will never fail to win this game unless your impatience hurries the result; your artistic nature is bound to be carried away by it if you do not force it by "performing" your imaginary body prematurely.

(Chekhov 2002, p.80)

Chekhov goes on to argue that he does not need to specify further exercises relating to these techniques as once the student has learnt how to 'play' with these games, the act of playing will automatically enable them to devise new forms of the game (and concomitantly develop the techniques and characters). He also points out that possibilities will open out for the actor if they are willing to engage freely with the various 'games' and that if they are able to trust this process, and enter into it fully, they will appreciate both the enjoyment inherent in playing this game (i.e. the pleasure), along with their considerable practical value (i.e. the development of imagination and skills in an indirect manner). Black (1987) argues that Chekhov's techniques work at optimum level when the actor approaches them 'with a sense of play' (1987, p.80) and Gordon also notes the significance of this playful quality in Chekhov's work and argues that '[s]ome [of the exercises] had a lightness and even 'party' feel to them. For the most part, this was intentional. In order to open up "new" areas of mind, Chekhov made actor-training fun' (1985, p.14). Chekhov's belief that actors needed to work with a sense of Ease (one of the Four Brothers along with Form, Beauty and Entirety or The Whole, Chekhov 2002, p.13) relates to this feeling of lightness. Indeed, Chekhov was adamant that 'acting should ever be a joyous art and never enforced labour' (2002, p.153). Merlin (2001) and Ashperger (2008) consequently refer to a notion of play when discussing his technique but do not offer an expanded analysis of this dimension of this practice. Chekhov uses different terms in relation to this use of play and games (this extended and constant type of 'improvisation') and centralizes the notions of imagination, spontaneity and intuition. However, a type of play which includes a varied and fluid use of game (or simple rule) structures can be seen to run throughout Chekhov's entire approach, including not only actor training but also the exploration of the text, the approach to rehearsal and final public performance. In this context, I would take this recognition of play one stage further and argue that rather than Chekhov's exercises working 'at optimal level' when explored within a context of play, actors cannot develop a fully embodied imagination in a Chekhovian sense without an application of play as an imaginatively embodied principle underpinning their practice. Indeed,

Chekhov's embodied play is a centralised and very visible strand of practice in a number of current practitioners work including Petit in the United States, David Zinder in Israel, Wright and McDermott in the United Kingdom. However, what is of particular interest about Chekhov's form of embodied play is that it must be present, even if in a more 'covert' and not necessarily stylistic way in production, in any material that has been generated by an actor using his methods. This means that an actor can be engaging with this form of embodied play even if a director's approach is not Chekhovian and regardless of the production aesthetic.

Indeed, Chekhov does not distinguish between process and performance. Rather he argues that actors will not 'notice any substantial difference between the exercise and your professional work' and that this will confirm their 'belief that dramatic art is nothing more than constant improvisation, and that there are no moments on the stage when an actor can be deprived of his right to improvise' (2002, p.40). Central to Chekhov's form of play is his use of improvisation and Frost and Yarrow (2007, pp.15-16) point out that this was markedly different to Stanislavsky's proto-improvisation (and they note that it was Sulerzhitsky who introduced improvisation 'proper' at the MAT). Chekhov argues that the actor's 'compelling desire and highest aim can be achieved only by means of free improvisation' (2002, p.35) and that the actor must never be deprived of her 'right' to improvise. However, he also claims that concomitantly it is an actor's responsibility to always play in relation to different 'grounds':

[...] we should never start our performances, and even rehearsals, without having chosen a special point of our method which will become a starting point, a springboard, for our rehearsing and for our performances. It can be anything: Radiation; Atmosphere; Objective; Feeling of the Whole; Feeling of the Form.[...] and when we start our rehearsal, or our performances, having in mind this particular point of our methods, our attention will be concentrated on it, our interest will be awakened, and the feeling of being 'dry' or uninspired will disappear immediately [...].

(Chekhov 1992, cassette 3)

He explains that the actor can then 'drop' this ground and continue to follow the flow of performance until they feel uninspired at which point they select another 'ground'. As Chekhov applies this form of 'improvisation' in all areas of his approach, which operate as imaginatively embodied 'springboards', it moves beyond an application in limited or mechanistic frameworks. Whilst, not all improvisation is automatically play, in the context of Chekhov's practice we can see that his notion of improvisation correlates closely to his discussion and integral use of play and games as significant principles and as a way of developing the creative individuality of the actor as an artist in their own rights. Therefore I would argue that combined this is better understood as a type and of principle of imaginatively embodied play. This constant principle in operation is what Chekhov defines as the 'psychology of an improvising actor' (2002, p.4). Chekhov's own application of this consciousness led to performances which were famously different from night to night and du Prey noted his performances were like 'a game between him and his audience' (1978, p.13). Significantly, this play principle also led to Chekhov developing forms of what I am terming extended play at the Chekhov Studio, which will be discussed in Chapter 5, and this, in turn, led to processes of theatre-making which Chamberlain has rightly identified as early form of devised theatre (2004, p85).

In addition to the references to 'playing the games' of the Imaginary Body and the Imaginary Centre, and the notion of using 'springboards' for transformation, Chekhov uses a series of other terms which relate to the centrality of play in his practice. He frequently uses the term 'ground' (1991, 2002) to describe the way in which actors and/or directors can choose a particular focus for their work (Imaginary Centre, Objective Atmosphere, Quality, etc). This 'ground' in relation to the actors' imaginative embodiment can then create either quite specific, or general and fluid, 'rules' or structures for the actor to play with/among. On other occasions he talks about approaching the role or text by taking 'different points of view' through this approach, indicating a multifaceted and open process of transformation. Chekhov also uses the idea of actors working with, and finding, different 'necessities' (an

exemplar is exercise 12, 2002, p.p. 37-41) that add in further rules of the game or frames in which to play. He also repeatedly talks of not only exercises but also 'tasks', 'actions', and the actor's use of asking 'leading questions' to their images / imaginary characters (1991). However, the fact that actors are using these different grounds or rules does not stop it being play. Indeed, Bruner et al (1976) argue: 'Rather than [play being] 'random' it is usually found to be characterized by a recognizable rule structure. New studies [...] show how three- to five-year-old children, playing in pairs, manage implicitly even in their simplest games to create and recognize rules and expectancies' (pp. 17-18). In the case of embodied play for actors (and for children's play) these rules can be very basic, or very complex, very flexible, or extremely rigid. They can be externally imposed or internally created and possibly changed rules.

Chekhov also discussed how certain types of physical comic 'tricks' that he and Vakhtangov played developed very particular acting, and embodied play, techniques. As will be discussed later, Chekhov notes that the basic techniques of slapstick, lazzi and clowning are all important to actor training and performance and all of these are of course dependent on a highly developed sense of play. Chekhov's specific interest in clowning also developed this further and it is telling in this context that he argued: '[c]lowning will awaken within you that eternal Child which bespeaks the trust and utter simplicity of all great artists' (2002, p.130). Lastly, Chekhov, like Bing, from very early in his career advocated the playing of children's games without any adaptations made for adult actors (1919, in 1983, pp.54-55) to develop their creative imagination.

## **6. Re-considering Bing's Embodied Play**

Whilst there is no disputing the significance of Copeau's theatrical, literary and conceptual ideas and his later skill as a practitioner, we do need to more forcefully acknowledge that his work represents only one strand of the web of development at the VC, LC, CQ and their related schools and methods. As I have pointed out the other strands that contribute to this nexus of practice

were developed by equally gifted and innovative practitioners that worked with Copeau, in particular Bing as it was she who consistently embodied, and led, these experiments with play linking together the three different phases of actor training and theatre-making using play. She collaborated and cross-fertilised practices with many different pedagogues, actors, students and co-devisers. In the context of an embodied genealogy, we need to be mindful that we do not simply follow the post-enlightenment and Cartesian bias towards literary and intellectual knowledge that can dismiss the forms of knowledge that comes from embodied practice and analysis. However, this is not to suggest in overly simplistic gender terms that Copeau was the 'ideas' man whilst Bing was the woman, the who simply 'embodied' them to test them out and apply them as this would ignore the fact that Bing was highly able in both these areas and was arguably equitable in terms of the generation of innovative ideas, experimentation and contribution when we are prepared to read between the lines of the paternal historical records and early studies. However, ideas have to be embodied fundamentally in processes of actor training and theatre making and this was something that Bing excelled at, not only as an actor, but equally as a teacher, analyst, director and what I am terming a play-enabler. Donahue (2001) rightly attempts to re-configure the historiography of this group of practitioners in France by pointing out that that '[i]n order to bring about renewal in the theater, [Copeau] needed collaborators who gave substance to his concepts' (2001, p.63). This is particularly significant in relation to the areas of practice that the company started to explore in the early years and what I would suggest was the start of this form of embodied play in terms of the different contributions these practitioners made.

Copeau clearly had an instinctive and personal pull towards play, in large part based on how he experienced creative play in his own childhood, i.e. his affective history (1990), and with his collaborators he could see that play held the potential to become an underlying approach for an acting technique. During the early years of the company, however, he clearly encountered problems in transferring his intellectual and literary knowledge of theatre into an integrated

process which could lead to the imaginative-embodiment of these 'ideas' and interest in play in practice. Many accounts of the early years of this French strand of practice indicate how significant the contributions of Dullin, Jouvet and Bing were in the initial phase of development. Consequently, we need to be very wary of an overly simple master-disciple / director-actor framework when attempting to analyse the early work in relation to the ideas and forms of embodied play developed at this time, regardless of how experiments were documented by the company members and were subsequently written about. In 1915 when Copeau and Bing decided to work with a small group of children in order to observe them and to experiment with some of their early ideas on play as performance method it was the latter who was the consistent practitioner/observer and she spent time not only experimenting with enabling the children's play but reflecting on her own practice and that of others working in a similar context. Bing's time in the United States and her work with Naumburg was also pivotal to their development of embodied play. However, after the company returned to France Bing was to go on to further develop and refine a range of embodied play methods which she shared, and developed, with a significant number of younger practitioners, co-teachers and collaborators. The terminology that Bing and Copeau et al used in relation to this area of their work was fairly explicit in relation to an overall principle of embodied play: play; games; improvisations and what they described as free play which led to small productions generated by the students (Copeau 1990, Kusler 1979). However, as this study will demonstrate there was a curious contradiction in Copeau's position to play as a more fundamental principle of training and the use of extended play in relation to theatre-making in that he perceived this as something temporary. Bing, on the other hand was to take these embodied play methods into the working practices of the two later companies which was to take these experiments much further. We must be careful that we do not conflate Copeau's position on this with Bing's practice which was to continue for some time after he had withdrawn from the work of the French group.



In this context it is evident that we need to re-consider Bing's embodied play, not only to symbolically and confidently place her at the heart of this French strand of practice, but also so that we can look again at her work and specific contribution. Chapters 4 and 5 provides a detailed analysis of her work and looks at selected areas including her use of animal work, objects, fairytale and known narrative, character types and the use of musical and rhythmic languages in embodied play. Central to this re-evaluation will be an analysis of the type of play-enabling which she, and not Copeau, developed and what this brings to this area of practice.

## **7. Embodied Play as a Principle**

The use of these methods in relation to the actors' public performances meant that a process of discovery and change through play always continued even in highly scored productions. This level of embodied play in final performance obviously requires the actor to be in the embodied moment with whatever, whoever is present or happens. Consequently nothing is ever static in these techniques; there is a constant process of evolution, change and discovery. Indeed, as previously noted, Frost and Yarrow point out that this type of play leads to what they define as a state of 'interplay' i.e. the development of a wide range of possibilities in performance (1990/2007). This increase of possibilities is fundamental to this area of practice but, in turn, requires certain skills from the actor to be able to productively deal with this more open and nebulous field. In addition to this increase of performative possibilities, a use of embodied play also raises the status of the entire process itself in the work of these practitioners and in effect the final performance simply becomes another aspect of process, rather than merely 'product'. Chekhov explains that in his youth he was interested in the end result but that this perspective changed over time to place process at the centre of his practice. He explains: '[m]y whole interest is [now] directed towards the process of the work itself, its results coming as something unexpected' (2005, p.114).

## 8. Rules, Frames and Ways of Playing

This use of complex improvisation and games in Bing and Chekhov's respective processes did not produce entirely free play as they provided basic anchors, rules, grounds, or springboards for their actor's play whether termed improvisation, play, games or etudes. They therefore had some type of frame or net (even if very loose) and in this context can be perceived as a form of disciplining or controlling the actor's embodied experiences. Generally the techniques/exercises the students have been trained in are enough to constitute 'rules' for a creative game or play. The training in creatively approaching these 'rules' (focus) for a specific types of embodied play also teaches the actors the ability to self-determine play and consequently all aspects of their work can be seen to have become a type of game, once the principle has been established. New rules, or frames, can also be generated through the act of playing itself in certain contexts and are often transformed through the act of playing. When discussing one of his exercises (number 12) and how actors should work spontaneously, Chekhov explains that '[a]ny and every possibility is open to you according to your mood at the particular moment, or according to the accidental things you may encounter during the improvisation. All you have to do is listen to that "inner voice"' (2002, p.38). However, he also points out that there must be some clearly defined 'necessities', or what we might consider rules for this form of play: 'Because real and true freedom in improvising must always be based upon *necessity*; otherwise it will degenerate into either arbitrariness or indecision...Your sense of freedom would be meaningless without a place to start or without direction or destination' (ibid). Chekhov is articulating the ultimate paradox we understand in relation to play (or improvisation in his terms), that in order to generate freedom there needs to be also some way of restricting or structuring the embodied focus, i.e. a need, requirement or stipulation. This commitment to these various different forms of embodied play was clearly related to their overall belief that you could not, and should not, know the outcomes of the creative journey at the outset of the process and the belief that it is through an application of embodied play, in relation to some type

of rule or necessity, that the discoveries and outcomes would be found. Bing also notes very early on that play-enabling also requires teachers/directors to lead these forms of play in a way which retains a feeling of freedom for the player, but which is nonetheless structured (Copeau archive papers, 45, translated extract from the Notebook 'l'École).

## **9. Teaching Embodied Play: Systems or Approaches?**

The ways in which Bing and Chekhov developed techniques that drew on play is closely related to the way in which they taught these approaches to other actors. Kirillov argues that '[it] was never Chekhov's intention to invent his own system of acting. It arose as a natural result of his attempts to overcome his limitations and contradictions that he and other First Studio actors ... met on their common creative path' (2005, p.4). One could argue that this, along with the embodied-experiential nature of his practice, required him to develop a more fluid system of transmission of his ideas. In *Lessons for the Actor*, Chekhov clearly explains to his student that his techniques are 'not absolute laws' (1985, p.135) and this is significant in relation to play. The texts on his techniques for actors and directors are not rigid manifestos and they actively encourage experimentation and selection, as the following quotation exemplifies:

It might easily happen that while working upon a scene you will be in doubt as to which quality, sensation, you have to choose. In such a dilemma don't hesitate to take two or even three qualities for your action. You can try them out one after the other in search of the one that's best, or you can combine them all at once.

(Chekhov 2002, p.60)

Indeed he explains in his 'memo to the reader' in *To The Actor* that the methods he outlines must be imaginatively embodied if they are to be 'understood' at all: 'Many of the questions that may arise in your mind during or after reading of each chapter can best be answered through the practical application of the exercises prescribed herein. Unfortunately, there is no other way to co-operate: the technique of acting can never be properly understood without practising it'

(2002, p.liii). In line with his belief in the creative individuality of actors, Chekhov also actively encourages professional actors to 'make' his techniques their own, so to some extent to select, embody and transform them:

It has to be your method. You have to conceive of it in quite a different way, and no one else can conceive of it in the same way. I must give you my conception of the method, and you must imagine how you will accept it. Then you will get a vision of the method which is yours and not mine, and you can develop it according to your own individuality.

(Chekhov 1985, p.82)

Consequently *To The Actor* reads like an interactive and flexible handbook and whilst Chekhov defines a clear set of methods, and suggests orders in which to approach different techniques, the written tone requires the actor to experiment through trial and error, and in line with their 'creative individuality' and a sense of play. In his taped lectures Chekhov is open and relaxed about students deciding whether or not to use specific techniques and he encourages them to consider whether they personally find them useful in their practice indicating that actors will all have different needs and preferences (Chekhov 1992).

The first draft prospectus for the VC school also outlines their overall approach to training actors, and explains why neither Copeau nor Bing attempted to write down a rigid system relating to their work:

It is through play, in which children imitate more or less consciously all human activities and sentiments, which is for them a natural path towards artistic expression and for us a living repertoire of reactions of the most authentic kind – it is through play that we wish to construct, not a system, but an educational experience.

(cited in Rudlin 2000 p.74)

However, despite the lack of a written handbook or details of the techniques, there was certainly a clear approach that Bing developed over the years of training and directing student-actors. It is also interesting to note the way in which Bing's approach has been shared through embodied and relational live exchanges, rather than published books, manifestos or systems, is mirrored by a number of contemporary female practitioners who can be seen as part of her

lineage, such as Monika Pagnuex who was taught by, and then taught with, Lecoq. Annabel Arden (2008) argues that Pagnuex 'always resisted her work being written down, photographed or recorded in any way, insisting that it exists in the work of her students, and how they develop and transmit their own practice' (cited by Murray 2010, p.216). We also need to recognise the difficulty in this context of writing about practice that draws on very subtle and complex forms of embodied play.

Pitches notes the similarity between Chekhov's approach and Romanticism in terms of the way in which it 'is a holistic philosophy, emphasising the inter-connectedness of things and deliberately opposed to the atomistic or 'building blocks' approach in the lineage from Descartes' (2006, p.134). He also notes the parallel in terms of viewing 'humankind's relationship to nature' as one that is 'based on organic *inter*-relationships, a unity *with* nature rather than a separateness *from* nature' (Pitches 2006, p. 133 emphasis in original). Pitches notes that this organic and synthetic approach is also depicted in Chekhov's diagram of a circle, as opposed to Stanislavsky's commonly referred to model which is one of linear movement and progression. Whilst the French collaborators' approach was not entirely the same as Chekhov's, there are certain parallels with the way in which Bing et al developed their forms of embodied play and how this synthesised the many different components of training at the different schools to create an educational 'experience'. It would also seem evident that whilst using forms of play in actor training requires some kinds of rules or frames it also requires a particular form of teaching, i.e. it is perhaps better understood as a technique or approach rather than a totalising and linear 'system' which in some respects is the antithesis of play.

## **10. Play Frames and Tools**

Now that embodied play, as a key principal, has been identified as a significant moment of convergence between the case studies, a consideration

of the various definitions and understandings of play as a socio-cultural activity will provide a contextualisation of the further analysis of their methods in action. It is imperative that we acknowledge the difficulty in providing a singular definition of what 'play' is and this problem has been repeatedly acknowledged by various scholars and practitioners, more recently Brian Sutton-Smith (2003) suggested this difficulty is related to play being an area currently explored by a wide range of academic disciplines. Richard Schechner (2002) points out that, over time, the status of play in Western thought has had a complex history and that it has 'been both valued and suspect' (2002, p80) at different times. However, play as an activity viewed through the matrix of the Western post-enlightenment rationalist tradition, has frequently suffered from adult-centric, materialistic and Cartesian prejudice and, as Ann Cattanach a Non-Directive Play Therapist argues, patriarchal ideas about the role of women as players or play enablers:

As a Play Therapist, I experience the attitudes of some other professionals who think that play can't be an important healing mechanism for the child because play isn't serious – not like talking. Talking is a proper activity for adults. Gender issues are part of this attitude; play is something women do with young children, so it isn't intellectually rigorous and therefore is low down in the hierarchy of important therapies. Play is only important as a means to stimulate the child to talk.

(Cattanach 1992, p.31)

As we shall see, gendered ideologies about players and play-enablers similarly relate to aspects of the hidden parts of this genealogy, as does the notion that 'play' is only relevant in how it serves the written / spoken word.

Despite a growing interest in play during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there has been no real agreement on an overriding definition of the cultural phenomenon. In this context I will heed Schechner's suggestion that scholars call a moratorium on definitions of play (1993), and will not attempt to provide a generalised overarching description of play as a larger socio-cultural phenomenon but will rather seek to address which aspects of play were attractive to the practitioners featured in this research project, how they were

imaginatively embodied, transformed and considered, and how this related to their ideas about experiences of embodied acting in broader terms. The issues of definition and understanding become even more complex when we look at play being carried out by adults in industrialized societies who are operating in the context of professional performance. Turner (1982) defines play as liminal phenomena in tribal/agrarian cultures but he claims that in post-industrialised complex cultures this is a related, but significantly different phenomenon, which he calls liminoid. Related to this Turner and Schechner have discussed the problematic division of 'work' and 'play' in post-industrial societies (Turner 1982) and as the later examples will demonstrate that Bing and Chekhov's forms of play extended beyond the formal boundaries of theatre training / practice.

Regardless of the repressive prejudices and the problematic of the work / play dichotomy that influence a Western understanding of play, many psychologists and psychotherapists carried out research early in the twentieth century into the types and function of children's play and claimed that it is a psychological-socio-cultural phenomenon that forms a core part of a child's development. Concomitantly, Johan Huizinga (1955) put forward the argument that play should be viewed as a key component of culture, and specifically of culture creation. Later D.W. Winnicott also notes this relationship between creativity and play and argued that: 'playing is an experience, always a creative experience, and it is an experience in the space-time continuum, a basic form of living' (1991, p.50). He goes on to argue that '[It] is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self' (ibid, p.54). More recently, Stuart Brown (2009) a psychiatrist, academic and clinical researcher, argued that play's significance is now being better understood as a fundamental biological and neurological process and argues there is a growing scientific discourse of play and notes that for humans 'play lies at the core of creativity and innovation' (2009, pp 4-5). He goes on to point out that unlike some animals the human brain 'can keep developing long after we leave adolescence and play promotes that growth' (2009, p.48) and

that contrary to the adult-centric view of play in the West he goes on to point out that '[w]e are designed to be lifelong players, built to benefit from play at any age' (ibid). Erik Erikson reported (1973) on research findings which involved a thirty-year follow up study of people who had previously been studied as children which indicates that 'the ones with the most interesting and fulfilling lives were the ones who had managed to keep a sense of playfulness at the centre of things' (Bruner et al 1976, p.17). What the work of these various scholars and clinicians implies is that play is a fundamental, and embodied aspect, of human life, which is central to child development but that can equally continue in adult life in liminal or liminoid cultures. I.e. it is a motor-based, fully embodied activity which enables body-mind integration, what Caillois defines as a 'total activity' (Caillois 1961, p.175). Brown argues:

Movement is primal and accompanies all the elements of play we are examining, even word or image movement in imaginative play. If you don't understand and appreciate human movement, you won't really understand yourself or play. Learning about self-movement creates a structure for an individual's knowledge of the world – it is a way of knowing. Through movement play, we think in motion.

(2009, p. 84)

## **11. Progressive Pedagogy and Play**

A collection of progressive educationalists working early in the twentieth century were also actively investigating and using the pedagogic value of play, building on ideas put forward by earlier thinkers (Comenius, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Owen, Froebel, Dewey), and have been successful in having this use of play recognised, to a limited extent, in broader educational practice. Frost and Yarrow (2<sup>nd</sup> edition only, 2007) have pointed to a crucial nexus of cross-fertilisation between progressive pedagogy in the early twentieth century and the development of drama teaching and actor training. They argue that Naumburg and Boyd, early progressive educationalists, 'can claim to be originators in the use of play-based methods in drama teaching worldwide' (2007, p.125). Bing's time spent at Naumburg's school was significant in terms of her development of forms of embodied play, but it also provided her with the



opportunity to work with other teachers using play in a context very different to the VC. Naumburg's work epitomizes a dynamic fusion of practices and ideas including aspects of Maria Montessori's pedagogy. Later in life Naumburg trained in psychiatry and became a pioneering art therapist in the USA. This hybridity of training methods and influences produced some very interesting and seminal work as did her exchange with Bing which will be discussed in Chapter 4 and Appendix VI. Similarly, Chekhov's practice can be seen to have drawn on the pedagogical views of Rudolf Steiner who, like Naumburg, centralised play in the learning process along with drama, expressive painting and story telling (Christopher Clouder 2002). Steiner opened the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart based on Anthroposophical principles in 1919 and play in its various forms was established as a core aspect of the schools' syllabus. Again, like Naumburg, Steiner also believed in the importance of movement in a creative, expressive and spiritual learning process and his schools taught his system of Eurythmy, which Chekhov was also to use in his approach to actor training programmes and influenced the development of a number of his own techniques. Clouder also notes that Steiner believed that humour, laughter and joy were also important aspects of the teaching and learning experience, and this can be seen very clearly in Chekhov's use of play in actor training. Crucially Steiner also believed that teachers are artists in their own right. Similarly the way in which Chekhov encouraged teachers to work required them to also engage in a form of embodied play in this creative sense, i.e. use the 'acting' techniques in their teaching practice. The fact that the Chekhov Theatre Studio was initially based at Dartington Hall is relevant in this context. As has been noted, Dartington Hall was an experimental, progressive educational project that explored different ways of teaching the arts, crafts art and agriculture. Many different artists spent time at Dartington in the 1930s<sup>5</sup> and this led to the sharing of work and collaboration between practitioners. Daboo notes how Lisa Ullmann, who trained with Laban and worked with Jooss, was

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<sup>5</sup> Daboo provides a study on Chekhov's Studio at Dartington and notes 'The Elmhursts invited a number of prominent figures in the arts to live and work in Dartington during the 1930s, including the dancer and choreographer Kurt Jooss, director of the Ballets Jooss and co-founder with Sigurd Leeder of the Jooss-Leeder School of Dance in Dartington; the artist Hein Heckroth, who worked with Jooss as a designer; Rudolf Laban, whose approach was also based in Steiner's principles; the potter Bernard Leach; the American painter Mark Tobey; and a range of musicians including Hans Oppenheim' (2012, pp. 69-70).

also at Dartington Hall and taught dance to Chekhov's students (Daboo 2012, p.70). This enabled Chekhov to explore his own highly creative pedagogy and a use of play in a very radical and experimental context.

The work of Emil Jaques-Dalcroze and the Russian teachers at MAT/MAAT and its studios should also be recognised in relation to the work of the case study artists as they were developing progressive approaches to the education of actors. Play had been utilised by Jaques-Dalcroze in the early years of the twentieth century in his pedagogic approach to teaching musicians, singers and performers. Like the progressive educationalists, he also advocated a learner/performer-centred experiential approach that was built on a very different type of relationship between student and teacher. In his notebook 'L'École du Vieux Colombier', *Registres* / Copeau reflects on Dalcroze's gift as a teacher and on his specific use of play in the children's classes after his first meeting with him in 1915: 'Dalcroze lets them play [...] Everything must begin with the child's play. The great difficulty is to ameliorate his play without his being aware of it. Everything must come from him; nothing must be imposed or taken away. Helping him without his noticing it' (Copeau 1990, p.61). Copeau's detailed notes on Jaques-Dalcroze (1990, p.p.56-59) are also useful here as he identifies the following features of Dalcroze's approach that are helpful in an understanding of forms of actor training based on embodied play: it is performer-centred; it is completely experiential; it is process-based; and it is improvisational, full of discovery and change. He also notes how Jaques-Dalcroze establishes an environment of creative exchange with, and between, his pupils and encouraged them to observe and critique their own, and each other's work. This trust in the students' ability to discover and experiment themselves was reflected by his decision to allow students to lead certain classes for each other. Simultaneously this led to the performer having, or being given, a very specific sort of responsibility that was not the case in many other forms of performance training at that time. All of these features led to what Copeau describes as the establishment of a 'joyful' ensemble which demonstrated a sense of 'ease', and 'union' (ibid). Kusler (1979) explains that

following a visit to Jaques-Dalcroze, Copeau 'began immediately to work with Suzanne Bing...on the musical/movement studies. They assembled a group of about a dozen children who worked Thursdays with Mme Bing and Paulet Thevenaz at the Rhythmic Gymnastic Club in Paris, founded by Emanuel Couvreur and based on Dalcroze's ideas. The group worked on beginning eurythmics, dance, singing and games' (1979, p.13). Bing attended every week, observing, teaching and reflecting on the work. Bing and Marie-Hélène Copeau also attended the second visit to Jaques-Dalcroze's school with Copeau in 1916 where they were able to observe his work further. However, whilst Dalcroze established a playful and self-directed learning environment where the discovery comes from the student herself, Copeau notes that crucially there is still 'order, equability, eagerness, precision and discipline' in this 'well-organised life' (ibid, p.61) which was to be mirrored in both Bing and Chekhov's forms of embodied play. However, this also highlights one of the seeming paradoxes of play in general; the need for both freedom and self-determination, but also discipline.

The influence of Jaques-Dalcroze's pedagogic style on the work of Bing, in terms of delivery, and the development of her techniques with the students, was considerable. For example her notes on working with children during 1919 echoes their desire to create a similar environment and pedagogic approach to that developed by Jaques-Dalcroze:

I see that, as far as instinct is concerned, I cannot construct a programme; that I must follow their impulses, offer them ideas in accord with their occupations of the moment. Too much discipline tires them; they do not yet have for this the faintest notion of perfection; therefore the beginning will seem confused. However, a few dominant things will emerge on which we can return and, little by little perhaps, make them work. Do not hurry them; constant observation can reveal unexpected result some days, more than any so-called exercise method.

(Bing cited in Copeau's Journal, 31 August 1919 – archive item 32)

Bing was also able to observe one of Jaques-Dalcroze's students, Jessmin Howarth, when she joined the Vieux-Colombier in New York, and this will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Finally in this context, the influence of establishment of a modern tradition of rigorous actor training by Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko when they established the Moscow Arts Theatre (1938) needs to be considered in relation to the work of Bing, and particularly Chekhov who worked with them in Russia. Both Bing et al and Chekhov were clearly inspired by the idea that actors should undergo a rigorous period of training that demanded a very real and embodied commitment from the actor, although the approaches they developed are in marked contradistinction to Stanislavsky. The paradox for Bing and Chekhov was to not only develop forms of imaginatively embodied play that would free and open, and yet would also be rigorous, disciplined and focussed, but to also develop appropriate pedagogic methods and approaches that would enable actors to achieve this.

## **12. The Potentiality of Play**

So what did the French collaborators and Chekhov find useful in forms of embodied play? As we have seen, Bing and Copeau were particularly interested in various qualities of children's play. Copeau argued 'self expression...springs from the very soul of the child' (1990, p.9) and that '[c]hildren teach us authentic inventiveness' (1990, p.12). Bing and Copeau based much of their work on the observation of their own, and others', children at play and the latter's reflection on his first two children is useful here: '[The children's] unconscious genius amazes me. I have seen them create without effort, forms, colours, objects, costumes and disguises, invent actions, plots, people and characters, in a word transfigure everything that came near them' (1990, p.9). Bing's notes evidence a very detailed level of observation not only of the children and their forms and ways of playing, but also in terms of the identification and development of the necessary skills needed to become an

effective enabler of this type of highly imaginative and physical play. Their desire was to seek a form of child-like, naïve, play which would both require and result in actors being less 'worldly wise' and therefore more 'authentic' and 'inventive'. A few years prior to the French experiment Stanislavsky and Sulerzhitsky had also been exploring the notion of childhood naïveté in relation to actor training in Russia. Gordon explains that these men thought that adult actors might be able to regain some of the qualities associated with this state of naïveté (in this respect the development of imagination) 'through game-like exercises' and these were utilised in the First MAT Studio from 1911 (Gordon 1987, p.64). It is therefore likely that Chekhov would have encountered these early ideas and game-like approach when he joined the MAT and worked with both Stanislavsky and Sulerzhitsky from 1912 onwards (ibid). Like Stanislavsky, Sulerzhitsky, Bing and Copeau, Chekhov also recognised what he perceived to be a higher level of creativity in children's play, and this notion of naïveté and in 1919 wrote extensively about why he thought children seem able to use their imaginations more fully than adults (Chekhov 1919 cited in 1983, p.56).

As the notion of naïveté was central to the forms of play that were developed by Bing et al and also Chekhov it is necessary to pause to deconstruct what they may have meant by this term and how they hoped to develop ways for adult actors to reconnect to aspects of this experience. These ideas should not be too swiftly dismissed as simply a form of overly simplistic, romantic Primitivism as it acts as quite a complex metaphor. Indeed, Chekhov realized that this difference between adults and children could not be explained by claiming the child is simply 'endowed by nature with a greater measure of fantastic imagination' (Chekhov 1919, in 1983, p.56) but relates this difference to socio-cultural factors and types of 'knowledge'. He claims that children possess a limited fund of what he calls 'exact knowledge', which he later correlates to the 'exact sciences', arguing that their 'concepts are not systematized' (ibid). Because of this lack of knowledge of (and perhaps lack of reverence for) exact sciences, i.e. certain types of post enlightenment rationalist and positivist knowledge, or frames of thought, children can 'combine the

elements of their imagination without bothering themselves with the question of whether or not it has any counterpart in reality', and consequently they are guided in their 'imaginative construction only by feelings' (ibid). Therefore, Chekhov argues, the modern adult artist who has been socialised in these rigid and exact sciences must attempt to develop a certain type of naïveté in order to be able to combine elements of their imagination without being as dominated by rationalist and scientific frames of thought. He recognises that this is not something that an actor can just decide to do but rather it requires a systematic process of exercises and one of his suggestions is specifically for actors to 'play childish games' (1983, pp.54-55). This, of course, mirrors Bing's use of children's games with adult actors. This interest in the metaphor of naïveté implies that Chekhov, like Bing and Copeau in France, was hoping that developing forms of embodied play would enable actors to engage in creative play that was: (a) simple i.e. not dominated by 'Western sophistication' and its prescribed tastes; (b) less dominated by the 'worldly wisdom' they have been socialized to accept within their respective socio-cultural contexts; (c) trusting in the act of playing itself, and the often surprising discoveries that are made through play, and to trust with each other as players; (d) partially self-taught, i.e. actors engage in instinctive experiential learning and discovery through these processes of embodied play; and (e) less dominated by purely intellectually and culturally (i.e. socially expected) refined approaches and systems of judgment. Whilst this can be viewed as a desire to 'return' to a pre/non-rational state we need to remember that Chekhov (and Bing, Copeau et al) was seeking an alternative set of metaphors and techniques in contra-distinction to, and in critique of, the heavily textual analytical, rational and materialist approaches that he had experienced as an actor which he had found highly problematic.

Evans' analysis of the ideological constructs of the 'natural' and 'neutral' body in actor training discusses the problematic nostalgia about the 'naturalness of childhood' (2007, p.74) which is certainly present in the discourse about naïveté in relation to actor training. These ideas were broadly shared by Bing/Copeau and Chekhov but there is a significant difference in that

the former collaborators placed a greater emphasis on the romantic notion of 'purity' in childhood naïveté in relation to their use of Neutrality and the concept/belief that you can strip the actor of socialised responses, and this also needs to be deconstructed. John Keefe warns against 'embracing the dualism which proposes an 'experience versus innocence' dichotomy with regards to the work of Lecoq, and which affirms a kind of pre-conscious purity over the consciousness of 'a cluttered adult world' (Keefe in Murray 2003, p.157). Whilst this critique certainly applies to the writings of Lecoq, and to aspects of those by Copeau, to some extent it is to Chekhov's credit that he did not suggest that actors can completely return to some pre-adult, un-socialised, state through a creative engagement with naïveté; but his methods indicate that it may be possible for adults to regain some of the aspects, or skills related to, an understanding naïveté through sophisticated embodied play. In this context naïveté does not mean that adult actors can ever totally escape their own life experience, including the impact of socialisation and power, but rather that forms of embodied play can at least circumvent some of the socialised patterns, and self-censorship mechanisms, of embodied response to some extent and open up new creative spaces and experiences. Concurrently this type of practice can also enable actors to become aware of how socialized and often restricted their 'everyday' actions, responses and embodied identity is. Thus a by-product can be an acknowledgement by the actor of the existence of power relationships, hegemonic ideologies and to some extent what Foucault defines as the technologies of the body.

Chekhov's work (and other practitioners who developed forms of embodied play such as Joan Littlewood) also demonstrates that forms of embodied play can be used effectively without holding rigidly to the tensions of this childhood innocence - adult life experience dichotomy but can generate similar results to those achieved by Bing (and later Lecoq) who used forms of neutrality in relation to play. This highlights the need for a broader analysis of play and a reconsideration of some of the general assumptions and terminology. In this context we also need to recognise that the children at play

observed by Copeau, Bing and various others (e.g. Piaget) were often their own children, or other children from similarly European bourgeois backgrounds. Their wealth and privilege possibly secured a form of 'purity' or 'innocence' that was not necessarily available to children from lower socio-economic classes encountering poverty and hardship, and possibly working from an early age. In this context the very notion of pure childhood experience becomes open to further critique. This issue becomes much more complex when we stop to consider the type of life experience (social, emotional, behavioural) that even very privileged children can have. Indeed it should be noted that whilst Chekhov came from a Russian bourgeois family his father had been an alcoholic and various incidents in his childhood indicate that he did not have a particularly innocent experience of childhood and family relationships (see Black 1987, p.5) but rather understood complex and contradictory relationships at an early age. We should also take a moment to distinguish the affective histories of Bing and Copeau. It was Bing who existed outside the prevailing normative bourgeois expectations of women early in the twentieth century living as a divorced woman, working as an actor and teacher, and whose second child was born out of marriage. Indeed Bernard Bing's childhood cannot be perceived in these purist and romantic terms, yet Bing carefully observed his development and forms of play. We also need to pause to recognize that is hard to determine Bing's exact position on the notion of 'purity' due to the paucity of materials written specifically on her work and ideas, however aspects of her development of embodied play, in particular her work with the noble mask and the notion of neutrality in the later years, would indicate that she too sought to achieve techniques which seek to engage with this metaphor. But children from other social classes and very different types of background can still engage in play (see Joan Littlewood 1994, pp. 205-276) and Non-Directive Play Therapists point out that most children can be facilitated to play, even when they have been abused or deeply traumatized. What this appears to indicate is that children can engage as meaningfully in play even when they have not been kept in a state of 'pure innocence' and concomitantly this is therefore not



something that is vital to effective forms of embodied play for actors, directors and teachers.

Bing and Chekhov's play methods therefore work by intentionally *not* appealing directly or solely to the actor's analytic mind thereby allowing for indirect and imaginatively embodied discoveries that operate through a different framework. Actors therefore feel less self-conscious, more able to react spontaneously and intuitively. Therefore certain qualities present in the notion of naïveté that the practitioners could identify in children's play (simplicity, spontaneity, trust, experiential learning and discovery, and being less dominated by purely intellectually and an alytically refined approaches) are explored through their respective form of embodied play and made available to adult actors. What the examples in the following chapters illustrate is how these forms of embodied play can achieve important and specific skills, and a different type of consciousness, rather than an attempt to return to a 'pure' form of supposed childhood innocence, which in itself may be a myth.

Lastly, this interest in naïveté would also seem connected to the artists' belief that the actor should engage in imaginative transformation into characters/beings/images that are markedly different to themselves and do not have to be wedded restrictively and exclusively to only rational, positivistic, materialistic and intellectual frames of thought. This includes a transformative engagement with characters but also with a creative and relational encounters with elements from the outside world such as; the elements, animals, objects, forms, colours and space. This relates to the observed interest of children in transfiguring as an aspect of their everyday imaginative play. Adult actors are transforming into things that do not fit an adult-centric idea of rational scientific judgement, i.e. we rationally know that the visual image of an imaginary centre, or a staircase, or a tree is not a living person but in play frames we are able to enter into a creative relational exchange with them and find ways of playing and embodying their essence or gesture.

### 13. Pre-requisites for Play?

These features of children's play, and play in various aspects of performance and everyday life, were clearly attractive to these practitioners. We now need to consider if there are core performance skills that are related to these embodied play methods. Whilst it would appear that there are certain skills that are particularly helpful to actors engaging with play we must remember that these are also related to specific attitudes that are needed to similarly facilitate more effective playing, i.e. being open and available. It is therefore often hard to separate out technique and attitude as whilst actors physically need to be more 'open' to play well they also need this in terms of their internal and imaginative attitude, and as has been established both Bing et al and Chekhov's practices were psychophysical and therefore recognise the integral connection between these two things. Similarly many of these skills are hard to articulate in spoken or written words and have to be practically embodied in order for actors to grasp their essence and productive functioning. Murray (2003) suggests that *Disponibilité* (openness, availability) is a 'precondition' for play and whilst on the one hand this is totally logical, the paradox of play is that very often actors develop a higher level of these skills (i.e. *Disponibilité*) through the act of playing itself. Similarly, one cannot somehow 'practice' the act of playing without actually engaging in playing, even if it is a form of visualised individual play with a technique (i.e. Chekhov's technique of the Imaginary Body). So you learn to play well (and the related skills/attitudes) by playing; it is a cyclical relationship rather than a linear line of clear progression. Chekhov repeatedly tells actors that they should not worry about 'failure' per se (i.e. having to be highly skilled and 'successful' at the start) but rather just engage in the act of playing with the techniques and learn through that process of creative exploration based on trial and error.

Bearing in mind the points made above, there are a number of attitudes / skills which are needed for, but also developed through, the practice of embodied play which can be seen in the work of all the case study artists, as

will be discussed in the subsequent discussion. Underpinning all these techniques and attitudes is a willingness to trust these forms of embodied play themselves. This is complex as it is both a skill and an attitude that requires a certain type of commitment to the process, and, at certain points, a suspension of intellectual analytic reflection. It also places considerable trust in, and gives a degree of power to, the play-enabler. This relates to a willingness to take risks on a journey where the destination cannot be totally prescribed at the start. The development of embodied awareness and expressivity is of course also central to these practices, and it is generally agreed that play is rooted in the body, even during static forms of playing (see Caillois 2001, p.175). In practical terms for the actor, this embodied awareness and expressivity relates to issues of self-embodied (somatic) awareness, postural issues (see Evans 2007) and awareness of everyday embodied habits, along with expressively embodied practices in space, rhythm/tempo, form, movement qualities, size/scale/style, sensation, atmosphere, etc. These all depend on working with ease, energy and concentration as both skills and attitudes.

#### **14. Playful Modes and Styles of Performance**

In addition to this consideration of children's play, it is important, and arguably equally significant, to remember that these practitioners were also inspired by specific modes and styles of performance that also display, and require, the use of play. For example, *commedia dell'arte*, clowning, mask performance, circus and various forms of popular and street performance were to influence Bing et al and Chekhov and his collaborators. Many of the performance modes require highly embodied-imaginative performance which necessitates spontaneity, improvisation (play) and quick responses. These forms also require actors to be open to each other generally as a relational ensemble, and to the spectators and their reactions. Consequently, this means that they have to be able to use and respond to what happens in the moment during performance and indeed these forms/structures often prevent totally pre-determined outcomes in the final public performances. The embodied,

improvisational nature of some these practices (clowning, street performance, commedia dell'arte), as with children's play, centres on embodied activity and speed of response which helps to partially circumvent self-censorship mechanisms thereby releasing a freer working of the imagination in the adult performers. This also relates to their similar choices of performance modes and non-theatrical texts for work in their respective schools and studios which will be addressed in Chapter 5. Interestingly, there also appears to be a relationship between their focus on play and the selection of some of their professional repertoire, which is outside the scope of this study (see Appendix III). However, one clear example is the way in which VC's professional work with commedia dell'arte through their extensive exploration of Molière's plays in the company repertoire correlates closely to the work that they were also carrying out with the various different strands of play in actor training including character type, mask, animal work, rhythm, objects and the use of scenarios to develop extended forms of play. Playing with the mode and style of commedia dell'arte ultimately led not only to imaginative invention but also to the company's project to develop their own contemporary form of commedia dell'arte, the 'new comedy', i.e. the creation of performance material through play. It is significant in this context to recall that Chekhov was similarly inspired by commedia dell'arte. He had performed in a production of Molière's *Le Maladie Imaginaire* whilst he was working in Russia with Stanislavsky who had criticised him for 'having too much fun' with improvisation in this project (Chamberlain 2004, p.11). Nonetheless it is significant that he had early experience of not only performing in commedia dell'arte but also considering the type of improvisation, or play, that this form requires and the difficult balance between creative freedom and a level of discipline needed for an effective use of play and ensemble practice. Significantly du Prey (1978) discussed how Chekhov's ideas about the centrality of ingenuity and originality in his methods were correlated to what he defined and taught as the Juggler's and Clown's psychology and key aspects of commedia dell'arte. She recalled him arguing that 'the actor had always to be original, always inventive, always fresh' (p.13). In a similar manner to Bing and Copeau, Chekhov clearly linked the study and experiments with commedia

dell'arte and other classical texts with his development of embodied play in a broader sense.

Bing, Copeau and their collaborators and Chekhov were also actively committed to an exploration of a wide range of styles and modes of performance and were opposed to the dominance of Naturalism in the theatre. Copeau argues '[a]t the time we took over, Naturalism was a dead weight on dramatic inspiration' (1990, p.111) and he claims 'Naturalism aims low and it lowers itself to its subject' (ibid, p.121). Chekhov shared this negative perspective on Naturalism and he also related this to what he saw as a lack of interest in style in theatrical performance. He argued '[w]e must admit that in our present crude age, the actor, more than any other artist has lost his sensitivity to style' (1991, p.124). A wider range of styles, free from the tighter confines of Naturalism, can certainly be seen to have enabled (and to some extent possibly demanded) a fuller exploration of play in expressively embodied and stylistic terms by the artists. This exploration of style also demonstrates a link between professional production and training methods for Chekhov. For example, whilst still in Russia Chekhov performed in Vakhtangov's expressionist production of Strindberg's *Erik XIV* which was important to his development as an artist and his subsequent interest in the Grotesque and aspects of Fantastic Realism. When he took over the First Studio, Chekhov directed *Hamlet* for which he trained the actors and also performed himself. In addition to making some highly creative directorial decisions in term of style in this production we also note that this is when Chekhov start to apply his playful methods to the exploration and staging of an existing play text, his use of balls to physicalize Shakespeare's language and rhythms, and his early experiments with archetype as opposed to their own personality for character are good exemplars (see Black 1987, p.21). Indeed, Chekhov developed methods of play directly relating to a virtuosity and awareness of style and mode of performance. Exercise 67 is a useful exemplar; he suggests that students take a basic abstract theme and play with it in 'different theatrical styles as tragedy, drama, comedy, vaudeville, and clown style' (1991, pp.125-126). Interestingly

he also notes that when actors are able to engage with this type of freer experimentation with a variety of styles that this not only develops technical virtuosity but also felt sensations: 'Many new doors to the human emotions will be opened to you, and your acting technique will acquire greater variety' (2002, p.130).

Rudlin observes that certain styles brought a particular type of freedom to the VC productions:

It seems, then, that there was more "high" style in the production of the classics: Copeau was able to give himself more scope in composition and in creating movement patterns which reflected the rhythms of the text, rather than having to concentrate on the distillation of actual everyday behaviour demanded by most of the contemporary works.

(1986, p.63)

Concurrently, Bing and her colleagues at the school, were also exploring a wide range of performance styles/modes including mask work, what we would now define as modern mime, chorus work, clowning, aspects of Ancient Greek and Medieval Theatrical style, stylized movement, and *commedia dell'arte*. A wider range of performance styles, for example the "high" style and experimental (grotesque) styles, allowed for and concurrently demand a high level of physical, visual and spatial expression in frames that are less restricted by Naturalism. Interestingly, Copeau believed that plays like Molière's *Les Fourberies de Scapin* demand 'a sort of joyous elasticity, which bestows, which licences true creativity to the actor' (Copeau cited in Rudlin 1986, p73). This 'joyous elasticity' is exactly what not only permits, but also requires, a level of embodied play from the actor and ensemble and relates to this imaginative and physical virtuosity and spontaneity. Evans's (2006) analysis of how the VC worked on this production and how he argues that this provided a significant impetus for the company experiments with 'mime techniques' is useful in this context (see Evans 2006, p.95).

The shared interest in *commedia dell'arte* and either real (Bing), or real and symbolic (Chekhov), mask also requires transformation and exploration of mimesis/otherness in both realistic and non-realistic forms; mirroring another trait of children's play. Similarly these forms of performance and/or the styles in which they chose to present them in (i.e. Chekhov's production of *Hamlet* 1924) do not always wed actors to rational or positivist frames of thought or naturalistic modes of expression (i.e. Bing's highly stylized production of the Nō play *Kantan* 1924). This, perhaps, also adds to a deconstruction of what could be understood by naïveté and suggests that a different conception of these core qualities might be more useful to this discourse.

## 15. Playing Outside Theatrical Parameters

This principle of embodied play also extended beyond the frames created within, and justified by, the formally demarcated training/rehearsal/performance contexts for both case studies. In his autobiography Chekhov talks about how he invented and played complex games with Vakhtangov in their shared residences, and between rehearsals, often for extended periods of time:

Apart from our common theatrical work where [Vakhtangov] was my teacher, we would often spend hours [...] in conversation and making jokes together [...] Vakhtangov would invent some kind of [uncomplicated] trick and we would then spend hours elaborating it, becoming ever more refined in our adroitness and ease of its execution [...] For example, we had to portray someone who wants to drop a match into an empty bottle but misses the neck; he doesn't notice this and is amazed when he sees the match on the table and believes that the match has miraculously passed through the bottom of the bottle. We repeated this and similar tricks dozens of times, until we had reached a virtuoso level of execution.

(Chekhov 2005, p.52)

What is striking about this example is how they indicate the way in which various embodied play techniques, and a specific sense of ensemble, were developed outside the formal 'work' context. The lines between formal training and life playing are blurred. This requires that we acknowledge other less formal systems of exchange and skill development and recalls Foucault's claim

that genealogies should seek to record events in 'unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history' including what he terms 'sentiments' (Foucault 1977A, pp.139). In this context these sentiments need to be related to the dynamic relationships between the ensemble members. Chekhov also reflected on how these types of 'tricks' that he and Vakhtangov played developed very particular acting, and embodied play, techniques: '[g]ames involving such tricks are extremely useful for an actor's development and they need to be included in the programmes of drama schools. A trick never works if it is done too labouredly. Lightness is a necessary condition for its execution.' (2005, p.54). Indeed this example indicates the non-formal skill development of embodied play in particular in relation to the comedic forms, and the related techniques, of slapstick, lazzi, clowning and tricks, all of which are highly developed forms of play. Chekhov also argues that '[c]lowning will awaken within you that eternal Child which bespeaks the trust and utter simplicity of all great artists' (2002, p.130). Importantly, these forms of embodied play also require a very specific and dynamic relationship between the actors and the audience. All of these techniques were of considerable value to the case study artists. Significantly these were modes of performance that Bing, Copeau and their collaborators were also exploring.

The forms of living, playing and celebrating in the later VC School, LC and the CQ also blurred these formal boundaries of embodied play. While the original directive for communal living and the need for ritual may have come from Copeau, it was arguably Bing's work as the experienced and embodied point of continuity as play-enabler-teacher, actor, director and community member that facilitated the development of these aspects of embodied play in practice. As Kusler points out, when the company started to live communally in Burgundy, they were carrying on the work developed by the apprentice group in the Paris school under Bing's direction and involved the students developing school rituals. This included 'a new student initiation ceremony' and '[c]elebrations with masked dancing and games [that] were held on birthdays or special events' (Kusler 1979, p.36). The company logbook also references



dances and the playing of charades (Rudlin 1986, p.87), and forms of charade were also used in the training programme by Bing (Kusler 1979). What is particularly pertinent here is the way in which these other forms of embodied play were to feed into the form, style, dramaturgy and focus of the development of the 'new comedy' by the company in Burgundy and the later work of both LC and CQ, which will be addressed further in Chapter 5.

## **16. Risky Play, Dark Play and Psychodynamics**

However, these uses of embodied play outside the demarcated formal 'work' boundaries were not always idyllic. Chekhov's description of his 'monkey' game with Vakhtangov when they were sharing hotel rooms whilst on tour in southern Russia reveals how they developed a form of play to negotiate the more difficult aspects of their relationship and how this extended form of play slipped into high risk embodied play when their self-created safety 'boundaries' were breached. 'The person playing the 'monkey' had to 'get out of bed first and everything associated with preparing the coffee had to be done on all fours, whereas the one who wasn't the 'monkey' on that particular morning had the right to beat the monkey for everything that seemed to him to be worthy of chastisement' (2005, pp.66-68). But as Chekhov notes their 'accumulated passions finally burst out' when the 'monkey rebelled' and a 'cruel battle began': 'One of Vakhtangov's blows struck me on the face and broke a tooth [...] I managed to get Vakhtangov's head under my arm and squeeze it firmly [...] The battle was over and, with it, our 'enmity' (ibid). Chekhov explains that in fact these battles had a 'sportive character' and despite a roughness 'there was a good deal of merriment and youthful enthusiasm in them' (ibid). This is a useful example of the psycho-dynamic risk involved in aspects of this type of embodied play and demonstrates the slippage between more contained and more risky, rule-breaking, forms of play. As Huizinga notes '[t]he contrast between play and seriousness is always fluid' (1955, p.8). It also appears to have enabled the two men to work through issues of status (they were reportedly highly competitive with each other as actors) and the dynamics of

their relationship and to some degree this mirrors certain aspects of children's play (rough and tumble, status games, etc). These examples further disrupt the traditional post-industrialist boundaries of work and play and suggest that these forms of embodied play had a level of significant fluidity. In this respect Emily Claid's discussion of play is helpful:

Playing exercises the imagination as a physical dynamic, a network of connections. To play is to improvise. Play describes non-linear sequences of creative narratives, logic itself becoming play. Play suggests parody and self-reference, an ability to step aside from rationality and subjectivity, an opportunity to approach life as a game of chance. Play provides a vital element in the performance of gender. The practice of play allows for spontaneity. Play suggests a game, which has its own seductive element – you never know at the outset who will win or lose. A game implies rules that can be made and broken, and playing a game offers more creativity than the end goal of winning or losing. Play allows for love, humour, joy and anger. Play is the un-thought, outside of being.

(Claid 2006, p.182)

In addition to playing beyond more formal boundaries what further differentiates the practice developed by the case study artists from other more limited, or mechanistic, uses of play and improvisation is that this spirit and technique of embodied play extends to all areas of their work including: the development of ensemble and community; the acquisition of skills and approaches; the development of character; embodied analysis of the material; the scoring of action; the generation of material through the use of play methods; and the final performance of the work. This moves far beyond the use of improvisation/games in a limited framework - i.e. using them just to 'flesh out' one aspect of a character, enabling a director to 'try out' one possible staging decision, or to optimizing a specific technique - to a play principle that underpinned their entire process and becomes a performative ideology; an embodied play methodology.

## Chapter 3: Chekhov's Embodied Play

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### 1. Introduction

This chapter seeks to demonstrate how and why forms of embodied play were central to Chekhov's practice. It provides an in depth analysis of how his technique of Imaginary Centre works as embodied play. This considers how this technique develops actors' skills, and attitudes, and how the actor experiences this form of play in relation to transformation in characters that are markedly different to their everyday selves. It will consider the features and forms of play that are present in this technique including how play changes the way in which the actor uses their ego and the types of consciousness that it can lead to. Significantly it will also consider how Chekhov suggests that this technique can be used to invent character, totally independent of play texts. Following this detailed discussion the chapter will briefly expand the focus to briefly consider three other contrasting techniques or foci of Chekhov's technique in relation to play: Psychological Gesture; Objective Atmosphere; and Clowning. This analysis will then consider how these forms of embodied play lead to a radical play-based form of analysis of text and approaches to rehearsals. It will also consider how Chekhov's style of play-enabling also connects to his ideas about approaching rehearsal processes. Lastly, it will argue that the notion of Neutral Consciousness presented by Yarrow (1986) and Evans' subsequent re-consideration of this state as Active Consciousness (2009) should be re-considered in relation to what will be introduced as an embodied play consciousness in order to expand the currently dominant discourse on *Le Jeu* and concurrently to allow for the differences between different strands of this genealogy.

## 2. Playing with the Imaginary Centre

Chekhov explains that actors need to experiment with his technique of the Imaginary Centre 'freely and playfully' to explore and create characters in imaginative ways. He explains that if they play with this 'game' they will find that innumerable possibilities will be 'opened up' to them. He adds, 'You will soon get used to the "game" and appreciate it as much for its enjoyment as for its great practical value' (2002, p82). It is therefore necessary to analyse the form of play that actors undertake within these creative games. The Imaginary Centre is a playful process that facilitates character creation and an exploration of a text, which is imaginatively-visualised and embodied. It is based on the actor's intuitive understanding of their character(s) or role(s) taken from a play or other sources. It can be used separately or can be combined with the technique of the Imaginary Body, a visualized image of the character that the actor freely imagines. Daboo argues that the Imaginary Body 'allows the imagination to have an immediate, direct and altering effect on the entire bodymind, resulting in a transformation of 'self' through engaging with the image of a different physicality' (2007, p.266). Interestingly, actors ask their Imaginary Body what Chekhov terms 'Leading Questions' in order to learn more about the image/character, in a manner not dissimilar to working with masks. This is quite a distinct form of play and although the image comes quite spontaneously to the actor at the start, there is period of working with the image using this imaginative questioning that allows for change and development in its visualized state prior to, and during, the embodied incorporation by the actor (2007, p.4). Whilst this shares traits with Frost & Yarrow's (1990/2007) definition of improvisation, it works quite differently, although it is certainly a form of imaginative play. The Imaginary Body and Imaginary Centre are used prior to detailed textual analysis thereby providing a radical and playful alternative to the use of intellectual textual analysis in the early stages of rehearsal, i.e. Stanislavsky's early table work that Chekhov found highly problematic. Chekhov explains that with Stanislavsky they carried out table work

for lengthy periods 'speaking about our parts and our characters, and becoming very clever and wise about the play' but he notes that when they stopped this textual analysis and started to work practically 'we saw that nothing had come from all our analyzing of the part and the play. Our intellectual approach always killed the desire and ability to act until after several difficult days, when we remembered we were actors' (Chekhov 1985, p.95). Effectively the Imaginary Centre becomes a form of 'non-materialistic' embodied and imaginative analysis, or perhaps better described as a way of understanding the text or stimuli that actors may be exploring as Chekhov was opposed to the notion of materialistic analysis and preferred the concept of synthesis (LTT 04/06/1936 MC/S1/7).

An actor might first use the technique of the Imaginary Body to visualize their character in their embodied-imagination (i.e. this is freed from their own personal and habitual psychophysical embodiment) and from this they identify the location of the Imaginary Centre as the source of energy and 'psychophysical' impulses in this character's bodymind. The Imaginary Centre(s) is located in or around the actor/character's body (either static or in movement) and is understood as the source of the character's energy and what Chekhov terms their 'psychophysical' impulses. Chekhov argues that when the actor 'pretends' that the centre of energy and impulse is located in the middle of their chest (a few inches deep, i.e. located deep within the body) they will feel 'that [they] are still [themselves] and in full command, only more energetically and harmoniously so' (2002, p.80), thereby approaching his notion of the 'Ideal Centre' in terms of energy use, postural/somatic awareness, focus and spiritual potential. The Ideal Centre in conjunction with his notion of Radiation of energy enables the actor to be ready, alert, open and in the moment and also able to notice the differences that the other Imaginary Centre(s) can bring. This shares some of the experiences of working in noble mask that Bing and Copeau developed but is accessed through this very different form of play. What is significant is that Chekhov points out that as soon as the actor starts to shift this Imaginary Centre from the Ideal Centre to

other parts in, or around their body then 'your whole psychological and physical attitude will change' (2002, p.80). The Imaginary Centre, as a form of embodied play, works through an instinctive, yet complex, feedback loop (Marshall 2001, Chamberlain 2004) between the visualized-imagined-embodied dimensions which concurrently trigger felt sensations (stirring the 'inner life' or 'psychology') in the actor which feeds back into this cyclical exchange. This relates to both imaginative embodiment in visualized stillness and in motion (see Daboo 2007). This means that the Imaginary Centre triggers sensations, but in an indirect and body-based manner, which is important to Chekhov's technique as a whole. In addition to being used to explore a character as a whole the Imaginary Centre can also be used or adapted for different scenes and/or separate moments of performance, in which case the Imaginary Centre may change between sections.

Actors find that just the location of energy and impulse in, or around, their body creates significant changes to their 'whole psychological and physical attitude' (2002, p.80) moving away from their 'own stiff body' (1985, p.145) and personal habits. In addition to the centre being able to 'draw and concentrate your whole being into one spot' in the actor Chekhov notes that it is from this point 'from which your activity emanates and radiates' (2002, p.80), i.e. the actor sends out this creative inner energy back out into a relational exchange with everything outside, or beyond, the actor's body. The actor can choose to incorporate the Imaginary Centre in the whole body at the start, or work through isolated body parts. The latter concurrently develops the skill of isolation for play with characterization and expressive movement which Bing also used in her actor training and the development of mime (see Kusler 1979, p.124). Chekhov also noted that if you carefully observe people and analyse their posture and movement/gestural patterns you can identify their 'Centre' and certain related aspects of their personality. The Imaginary Centre is further developed by visualizing the Centre as a specific object or entity which does not have to have a literal connection to the text or character, but rather needs to be an instinctive and

intuitive response to the actors' interpretation of the main essence of the image/character. Actors go on to invest the Imaginary Centre with various detailed qualities, i.e. a shape or form, type of material, size, colour, texture, temperature, movement qualities (if applicable) and so on. Importantly, this 'game' recognizes the playful and creative potential of imagery, or in this case a three dimensional form, can offer an actor and relates to their development of both a visual language and a different way of being able to engage with form.

This more developed and visualized- embodied Imaginary Centre in turn self-generates more specific 'rules' for this imaginatively embodied form of character play through the specificity of its various features (form, temperature, location, movement quality, etc). Consequently the 'rules' or frames for playing with a light, fragile and floating Imaginary Centre are very different to those that come from working with a heavy, dark, pulling centre. Chekhov's use of Fantastic Psychological Gesture is another good example of how play that is led by the identification of an 'essence' in external (or both external and internal) forms as rules works in practice. As Malaev-Babel explains, Chekhov encouraged his students/readers to discover a Fantastic Psychological Gesture (a large, well formed archetypal gesture), an 'essence', for 'plants and flowers, architectural forms, different landscapes' (in Chekhov, 2002, p.185). This play with the 'essence' of external forms and natural phenomena is also seen in the work of Bing, Copeau and their collaborators. Again, this requires the actor to use this form or image to create a set of 'rules' or 'frames' for their embodied play. Interestingly in this respect, Evans notes that many movement teachers currently working in British Drama schools also use images to enable their students to train and transform their bodies. Whilst he examines slightly different practices, and does not address Chekhov technique, his comments can be usefully applied to the Imaginary Centre: 'The role of imagery and the relationship between imagination and movement training [implies] a different level of consciousness than the strictly rational or the impulsively emotional or physical, whilst maintaining the best

qualities of all three' (Evans 2009, p.89). This specific form of threefold embodied consciousness is very useful to our understanding of how embodied play with the Imaginary Body and Imaginary Centre works and starts to help articulate what the actor's experience of these games might be.

Chekhov acknowledges that a basic Imaginary Centre can create a character that is expressively larger than naturalistic representation. It can be stylized or grotesque, which often has parallels with certain character 'types,' and is more suited to certain modes or styles of performance (for example *commedia dell'arte* or *Fantastic Realism*). However, he points out that many modern plays (i.e. those operating to a different mode or style of performance) may require a 'finer' or different application of the Imaginary Centre (2002, p.82). Working with the Imaginary Centre produces a fluid form of play which can trigger different types, and layers, of game for the actor. This starts to indicate the flexible nature of Chekhov's forms of embodied play in that it can be used with a variety of performance modes and styles and is not wedded strictly to any one final aesthetic.

In some senses the Imaginary Centre is like an internalized abstract mask in that it determines the physical and psychological impulses/energy of the actor-character and whilst it creates a deep transformative connection for the actor it also creates a slight distance between the actor and their character. The centrality of the notion of mask in this practice is discussed by Chekhov himself in relation to the concept of character in detail (1992) and as he notes in this context actors 'never express [themselves] directly, but always indirectly' and that 'only these different masks give [the actor] the opportunity to be original, ingenious, etc' (Chekhov 1991, cassette 1). Similarly, Copeau argues that the mask 'symbolizes perfectly the position of the interpreter in relation to the character, and demonstrates how the two are fused one to the other' (Copeau in Felner 1985, p.43). He argues that the 'actor who plays under the mask receives from this object [...] the reality of the character. He is commanded by it and obeys it



irresistibly' (ibid). On many levels this description also applies to a successful use of Imaginary Centre, i.e. the actor needs both connection and distance in this process and must allow themselves to be 'led' by it completely. However, the key difference to an external, constructed, mask is that the Imaginary Centre's visualized 'mask' is found through playful experimentation from the start and is then open to modification through a continual process of imaginatively embodied exploration. To this end Chekhov explains: 'you must be free from any restraint in imagining the center in many and different ways, so long as the variations are compatible with the part you are playing' (Chekhov 2002, p.81). The Imaginary Centre (and the self-generated related 'rules') is therefore modified through this form of experimental play and the actor's openness to their 'felt' and intuitive knowledge about their character and unexpected discoveries. Evans provides an excellent discussion of body, and felt knowledge, in movement training for the actor which is also crucial to Chekhov's practice. He argues 'If we acknowledge that the body owns innate anatomical and physiological capacities then this is also suggestive of the existence of body 'intelligence' (2009, p.83). Therefore playful embodiment of the Imaginary Centre, and the actor's 'felt knowledge', can challenge or change the actor's initial ideas about the character they are playing (and their understanding of the text if there is one) and vice versa. Consequently, this form of embodied playing carries equal weight to the initial understanding of the character taken from the original text and more rational-intellectual thought. This form of play tends to open out the actor's ability to think more creatively and intuitively about the character and make surprising discoveries through the act of 'following' their Imaginary Centre, as a set of flexible rules rather like those generated by a mask.

This particular form of play is one of the main ways in which Chekhov's practices enable the actor to go 'beyond the playwright and the play' (Gordon, 1987, p.19) challenging a traditional notion of the play text (and to some extent a director's interpretation) operating as the dominant force in theatre making

practices. It is one of the major differences between his approach and that of Stanislavsky and many other text dominated director-teachers of the twentieth century. The way in which it bestows a significant status to the process of, and work generated through, these forms of embodied play in relation to the original text and more traditional ideas about the role of the director was, and remains, radical.

## **2.1 Playing to Develop Imaginatively-embodied Skills and Attitudes**

In technical terms, the location, form and various qualities of the Imaginary Centre directly affect the character's placement of weight and energy thereby giving a distinct centre of balance, posture and form of energy usage. This in turn relates to the discovery of/transformation into the character's rhythm/tempo (both inner and outer), their relationships to space (both real and imagined), Gesture, and the Qualities of internal and external Gesture/actions. Consequently the Imaginary Centre provides a playful, intuitive springboard for the actor/character's base-line bodymind. This can be further developed by exploring how the character's Imaginary Centre operates in situations which push against this base-line tendency (i.e. a character with a slow and heavy Imaginary Centre moving in extreme haste) and in this respect is rather like playing with 'counter-mask'. Chekhov also advocates a sophisticated use of tempo-rhythm (borrowed from Stanislavsky et al but radically developed in expressive terms) which can also be found through the Imaginary Centre and actor's can also experiment with having a polarity between their inner and outer rhythms in this respect. These 'games' foreground the actor's whole body in surprising ways and ensures that every aspect of movement and each quality of gesture is considered as expressive and capable of triggering sensations. Frost and Yarrow argue that a mask provides a type of expressive constraint on the actor, which paradoxically liberates them in creative and expressive terms. This would seem to also apply to the Imaginary Centre:

[Masks] constrain the performer and reduce some of his or her expressiveness (facial expressiveness most obviously, but also they remove a lot of habitual acting techniques by altering the voice and making strenuous demands on the physical carriage and movement of the actor). But, by this very process, a mask liberates the actor.

(Frost & Yarrow 1990, p.125)

This description, other than a physical covering of the actor's face, can be closely applied to the way in which the Imaginary Centre works. It is also telling in this respect that Chekhov was opposed to an over usage of forced facial expressions by actors and his form of play is designed to enable actors to find a more expressive use of their whole, integrated, embodied self in performance (1991, p.52). The mask-like function liberates the embodied imagination of the actor and frees them from their everyday habitual self and consequently, the outcomes cannot be pre-determined by the actor (or director). This requires the actors to be fully engaged in the process, living in the moment, and trusting this experience, in order to be play this game. Crucially, this game is also played with other actors and consequently it also further develops the actor's skill, or attitude, of disponibilité as discussed by Frost & Yarrow (1990, 2007). The Imaginary Centre therefore leads to the acquisition of specific performance skills in an indirect manner, however it also enables the actor to play with what Chekhov describes as the intangible elements of his technique (use of energy for example) and to make them tangible, i.e. felt by the actors and others around them.

At the same time, in an accessible and playful way, the Imaginary Centre also teaches actors how to play in a much broader sense, how to self-generate different features of the Centre and then to follow them like flexible rules or frames for their play. Indeed Chekhov notes: 'There is no need to outline any [further] specific exercises here. Rather, you can devise them for yourself by "playing" with imaginary bodies and moveable, changeable centers, and inventing suitable characterizations for them' (2002, p.84). This is a very important aspect of his technique; Chekhov is not just telling actors to use prescribed and limited theatre

games, nor is it simply improvisation as outlined by Frost and Yarrow (1990/2007). Rather it is a form of embodied play that can contain various games and uses of improvisation, but does not have to, and crucially it also teaches actors how to play in more profound and empowering way.

## **2.2 Playing with Sound, Voice and Word**

In Chekhov's technique a creative exploration of sound, voice and text is integrally connected to his form of embodied play. Kirilov points out that this leads us back to Chekhov's fully imaginative and embodied conception of Gesture: 'Gesture is one of the main, central and universal notions of Chekhov's theatre system: for Chekhov, gesture is the common denominator on which various aspects of acting such as speech, movement, psychology, etc. can be integrated and unified into the 'whole picture' (2005, p.227) (see Appendix V). In the same way that he advises actors to visualize an image of their character and their related 'inner life' when first starting to play the games of Imaginary Body and Imaginary Centre, he similarly suggests that they 'try to "hear" the characters speak' in their imagination (2002, p.133). This frees the actor from their own habitual vocal style and allows a space for a more original imaginative engagement in relation to vocal transformation and play. After the actor has played with the Imaginary Body and / or Imaginary Centre and their related movement and inner life, and they feel 'free' in this embodiment, Chekhov explains that the next stage in this game is to '[b]egin to improvise some suitable words or sentences' (1991, p.105). Therefore the Imaginary Centre can include imaginative play with vocal expression, words and possibly text. However, it is telling that Chekhov explains that the actors do not have to start by using lines directly from the play text (if there is one) but can simply start to improvise words using the Imaginary Body / Centre as the 'rules' for this vocal game. When actors are ready to explore an existing text (if there is one) Chekhov advises that they start to explore just a few lines at a time, and gradually build up the text. He explains: 'You will soon learn what kind of speech your

character is inclined to adopt – slow, quick, quiet, impulsive, thoughtful, light, heavy, dry, warm, cold [...] All such nuances of speech will reveal themselves to you through the same means of the imaginary body and center if you faithfully follow their suggestions without hurrying the result' (Chekhov 2002, pp.138-139). This gradual exploration of vocal exploration, and words, is important as it ensures that the actor keeps it connected to the overall embodied play that is taking place, and it does not allow the words (along with its relationship to the 'dry' intellect) to dominate the game. It is also relevant that Chekhov stresses that actors should trust this work enough to 'enjoy' their 'game' with these nuances of speech rather than toiling at this aspect of their work (ibid).

This form of vocal embodied play is mirrored in Chekhov's other techniques such as the use of Objective Atmosphere, Sensation, Psychological Gesture (2002) and therefore operates as a general principle in his form of play. What this means is that the actor is fully embodied and there is no division with regards to the vocal work. Indeed Chekhov's use of Steiner's practice of Eurythmy and also his work on voice also supports this connection between inner life, movement/Gesture and sound (see Ashperger 2008). When actors are playing without a pre-existing script and using improvised dialogue in relation to a specific 'ground' (or form of play) Chekhov advises actors not to use 'too many unnecessary words': 'Superfluous speeches very often lead you astray; they give the impression that you are actively doing your exercise, while in reality they paralyze the action and substitute for it the intellectual content of the words' (Chekhov 2002, p.67). This is a more radical aspect of Chekhov's use of play as it can potentially change the actor's/ensemble's relationship to language. Crucially, this approach to embodied play with sound and speech is similar to that developed by Bing and Copeau who believed 'the actor should proceed from immobility and silence to movement, then to sound, words, and text, in that order' (Felner 1985, p.38). This same approach was to be also used by Lecoq a number of years later

in France and is used by many of the artists that trained with him. Consequently, this would seem a central principle to various different forms of embodied play.

### **2.3. Play and the Flow Experience**

So what sort of game is the Imaginary Centre and how is the actor engaging in this embodied play? What are the rules or frames in operation, who is finding them and why? What is the relationship between creative freedom and the rules of the game and what does this do to the relationship between actor and director? Chekhov, like Bing and Copeau, was seeking ways for actors to imagine outside the parameters of their own memories, experiences and feelings and his form of play enables them to develop a creative relational experience with characters, energy, actors, audience, images, objects and other external and internal phenomena. This moves them away from their own habitual physical and psychological patterns and enables transformation. The way in which these play frames or rules focus the imagination and visualized-embodied action of the actor appears restricting but, as Chekhov discovered, it is actually very liberating in creative terms and is needed for this type of play. Wright describes this paradoxical dimension of games and some forms of play very well:

All games, whether open or closed, inspire spontaneous physical reaction and they keep these reactions live. Games confine action to a simple structure; they impose limitations on us in order to make us do something; they restrict us and channel our creativity.

(Wright 2006, p.86)

In effect it is precisely this restriction of focus, through the 'rules' of the Imaginary Centre (a 'ground' for embodied play), that intensifies the activity and increases the actor's creative freedom and imaginative engagement. It also keeps the actor in the moment. Chekhov argues the same point and claims that when actors are 'occupied in these gestures [...] our talent is freed' (1985, p.11). Therefore the intensification generated through the heightened engagement with the Imaginary

Centre results in the actor being able to exclude some of their 'worldly knowledge' and escape a level of their self censorship caused by self-consciousness through this focus. We are 'following the rules' and therefore can concentrate on playing the game. Actors are engaged in the embodied-moment and certainly experiencing a different type of consciousness.

Significantly, this notion of being creatively freed through this type of channeling is also addressed in the work Csikszentmihalyi and MacAloon on Flow experience which is related to play (cited by Turner 1982). They define six elements or qualities of 'flow experience' which can be summarised as follows: (1) Merging action and awareness: there is no dualism in 'flow' (flow perceived from the 'outside' becomes non-flow); (2) A centering of attention on a limited stimulus field (narrowing consciousness) results in a merging of action and awareness (i.e. non dualistic experience); (3) Loss of ego is a 'flow' attribute. The 'self' becomes irrelevant; (4) In flow a person finds themselves in control of their actions and of the environment (their skills are matched to the demands made); (5) The rules make the evaluation of the action unproblematic (the final judge is yourself); (6) Play is autotelic (no goals or rewards outside itself) and a willing suspension of disbelief is required (1982, pp.56-58). It will be helpful to consider the other features of what they define as Flow experience to this analysis of the Imaginary Centre.

What appears clear in this context is that an effective use of the Imaginary Centre requires a merging of action and awareness at certain points in the process of play, however as discussed in Chapter 1 actors are also required to develop a sense of duality, a 'Divided Consciousness', which effectively becomes moments of non-flow at certain points in the process. As has been noted, playing with an Imaginary Centre certainly requires the actor to focus their attention 'on a limited stimulus field' by providing internally produced, flexible, rules. Csikszentmihalyi & MacAloon also argue that the way in which consciousness is narrowed or

intensified in this way requires the participant to give up a sense of past and future and just deal with the moment. Turner reflects on how this works:

[T]he conditions that normally prevail must be “simplified” [...] A game’s rules dismiss as irrelevant most of the “noise” which makes up social reality, the multiform stimuli which impinge on our consciousness. We have to abide by a limited set of norms...Our minds and our will are thus disencumbered from irrelevances and sharply focused in certain known directions

(Turner 1982, p.56).

So in effect the intensification generated through the heightened engagement with the Imaginary Centre results in the actor being able to exclude a level (not necessarily all) of their social ‘noise’. The actor simply cannot be distracted by this ‘noise’ as they are literally too busy, and too engaged in an imaginative-embodied way, engaging with this restricted focus or task. Whilst this is not the same as a romantic desire to return to a pre-adult ‘innocent’ state, it does perhaps help us to understand how these forms of embodied play enable actors to resist the complete dominance of the social noise (‘worldly knowledge’), thereby achieving one of the qualities/experiences Chekhov associated with the metaphor of naiveté.

The loss of, or different use of, the actor’s ego, is a particularly complex and interesting aspect of embodied play in relation to both Chekhov and Bing and will be discussed later. The fourth feature, finding that technical skills are matched to the demands made by the Imaginary Centre, can be seen in the way in which this ‘game’ operates through a process of experiential sensations, trial and error, and modification which is deeply rooted in the actor’s own embodied-imagination and is therefore largely self-determined. However, the ‘game’ can draw on, and subsequently develop, many (if not all) of Chekhov’s other techniques as needed for the particular Imaginary Centre and the frame in which it is being played with (i.e. you can play with developing your character’s Imaginary Centre whilst engaging with Objective Atmosphere, etc.) The idea that the evaluation of the action, the form of play, lies with the player themselves is also, on the whole,



applicable as the actor's 'felt' knowledge gives them a type of instinctive feedback. However, when this embodied play is negotiated through relational exchanges with other actors and framed, shaped and selected by external collaborators (and directors) and ultimately the audience, this issue of evaluation obviously changes to some degree.

The sixth feature they identify, that play is autotelic (1982, pp.56-58), is also very useful to this analysis. Whilst the use of the Imaginary Centre is not in itself autotelic as it is clearly being used to explore (or create) a character and therefore produces some type of end result, it does require a paradoxical autotelic playing attitude in order to function with efficacy. As we have seen, Chekhov points out that the actor cannot attempt to play this game simply with the intention of quickly achieving an end result or fixed goal. He explains that actors must trust that these techniques will be 'powerful enough to change your psychology and your way of acting without being "helped" by pushing or forcing of any kind' (2002, p.138) and this also relates back to his technique and attitude of developing a sense of Lightness and Ease in performance. This type of patience helps actors to develop a sense of being open to discoveries that can 'drop' into their creative process if they are able to avoid rushing or pushing (i.e. attempting to more rigidly control/pre-determine) end results. It also means that useful discoveries are made through possibly failed experiments. This opens them to chance, serendipity and accidental discovery and trains actors to trust their own intuitive responses. As Brown argues: 'Play also promotes the creation of new connections that didn't exist before, new connections between neurons and between disparate brain centres' (2009, p.41). In this respect Rudlin's discussion of this aspect of play in relation to the work of Copeau and Bing is also relevant as he notes that it is easy to make the 'gravest of all mistakes, obliging people to play' (1996, p.27) and that much of the research into play indicates that this 'constitute[s] a mind-set which should be offered, not insisted upon' (ibid). As Rudlin's discussion of George Leonard's work indicates, 'it was not the game as constituted by a set of rules that was the thing,

but the relationship of the player to the game that constituted creative play' (ibid, p.22). What this means is that engaging in this form of embodied play requires a very specific attitude and embodied relationship to the game and other players by the actor:

Sometimes running is play, and sometimes it is not. What is the difference between the two? It really depends on the emotions experienced by the runner. Play is a *state of mind*, rather than an activity [...] We have to put ourselves in the proper emotional state in order to play (although an activity can also induce the emotional state of play).

(Brown 2009, p.60)

Indeed committing to playing these games in an 'autotelic-manner' is yet another type of body-mind game that actors have to engage with as there is, ultimately, going to be a performed 'end result' but this cannot be allowed to dominate the creative process. This is a crucial aspect of embodied play in relation to the work of Chekhov and Bing et al, but is also hard to define as 'acting technique' in purist terms as it is to do with the development of an attitude, particular kind of openness, or disponibilité and use of energy, which essentially cannot be forced and does not relate to one isolated expressive 'skill'. This hard to articulate, but crucial, component of Chekhov's approach to actor training must be considered if we are to effectively analyse the way in which his methods operate. It is not sufficient to describe it merely as a holistic, romantic or mystical approach to training, it is a very specific set of experiences, embodied 'states of mind' (or forms of consciousness) and skills that are accessed through play.

## **2.4 Features and Forms of Play in the Imaginary Centre**

Roger Caillois' work is also valuable in terms of trying to deconstruct how Chekhov's Imaginary Centre is working in more detail. Caillois notes that make-believe situations tend to generate forms of rules and this is crucial to the work of these practitioners. He also identifies four different type of game: *Agôn* –

competitive games; *Alea* – games dependent on chance, where the player does not have control over the outcome; *Mimicry* – games relating to an imaginary universe; and *Ilinx* – games based on the pursuit of vertigo which destroy the stability of perception (Caillois 2001). Whilst Caillois acknowledges that most games contain combinations of these qualities, Schechner (1993/2002) has rightly pointed out that the intermixing of these qualities in most games actually negates their status as solid categories. Whilst agreeing with Schechner on this point, I think these terms, if seen as loose qualities which can be mixed, and moved between, might be a useful tool in this analysis. In the case of the Imaginary Centre there is of course *mimicry* but to some extent the method also destabilises the actor's everyday perception, i.e. there can be a level of *ilinx* because they are allowing themselves to be 'led' by this visualised object/entity and that this enables them to discover new possibilities, challenging the stability of their everyday perception and reactions. This then leaves the outcome dependent on a complex type of chance, *alea*, as the outcome cannot be pre-determined or completely controlled. What is complex here is that the rules, (the form of the Imaginary Centre) have been determined by the actor in response to the source material, but then the actor must allow themselves to be led by this Imaginary Centre in order to experience these moments of *alea*. Therefore the Imaginary Centre involves a complex movement between these types of 'game' at various stages, and in various combinations. Although this sounds highly complex, the experience of playing the 'game' is in some respects very simple.

Caillois (2001) also claims that there is a type of continuum of ways of playing which extends from very free play (*paidia*) to the opposite pole, which is play within a highly structured frame (which he calls *ludus*). In relation to the way in which the Imaginary Centre is operating it would appear that whilst it provides a level of structured play (*ludus*) in terms of the identification and location of the Imaginary Centre itself but at other points the play needs to move towards the *paidia* pole in order to facilitate the actor in making the unexpected, and possibly

uncontrollable, discoveries by following this formulated centre i.e. the experience of *ilinx*. The discoveries at this end of the pole will then at times re-configure the Imaginary Centre itself (i.e. it will then change the structured aspect of the play, the *ludus*). At later stages the use of technique might move more closely to the *ludus* pole if the actor was engaged in work relating to other actors, other play techniques and scenes and the Imaginary Centre has become more refined. It appears that to some extent this movement back and forth between the two poles in this game enables the actor to maximize the way this embodied form of play works. This can perhaps be correlated to the sense of release and control, freedom and discipline which, as has already been noted, are paradoxically essential elements of play. Chekhov also talks of what he defines (after Steiner) as the relationship between the Higher Self and the more Everyday Self in later stages of rehearsal and final performance in similar terms. He believes that the actor's Higher Self 'enriches and expands the consciousness' (2002, p.87), giving them access to a more creative state and relates to the experience of a dual consciousness but also notes that it 'can take command over the entire creative process' and that 'it has its tendon of Achilles: it is inclined to break the boundaries, overstep the necessary limits [...] it is too free, too powerful [...] It needs restricting' (Chekhov 2002, pp.87-88). He argues that the level of restriction is 'the task of your everyday consciousness' which 'fulfils the mission of a common-sense regulator for your higher self [...] Thus, by the co-operation of both the lower and higher consciousness, the performance is made possible' (ibid). However, he also points out that there is also a third 'consciousness' present, which is the character that has been created by the actor and that '[a]lthough it is an illusory being, it also, nonetheless, has its own independent life and it's own 'I' (ibid). This notion again allows the actor to relate to the character as something connected to, but also distant from, themselves in the same manner as the Imaginary Centre working like a mask. This co-operation and movement between the poles of free play (breaking the boundaries, powerful, ingenious) and very structured play (using the frames

that have been found for performance) is crucial to Chekhov's acting methods and are facilitated through his methods of play, such as the Imaginary Centre.

## **2.5. Playing with Difference and Transformation**

Chekhov encouraged actors to actively seek the differences between themselves and their characters, rather than looking for similarities. This is in marked contradistinction to Stanislavsky's suggestion that the actor consider what they would personally do in the given circumstances that a character is in and seeking their own analogous emotional memories to map into their performances. Chekhov's form of play also facilitates the imaginative possibility of the actor transcending the physical differences that exist between themselves and their imagined role, which is the antithesis of casting to type that he was strongly opposed to (2002, pp.26-27). Indeed, he believed that the use of the 'little, dry, condensed egotistical self' (i.e. how the actor showing how she loves, how she hates) leads to a degeneration of theatre and selfish performance in which actors are not able to give or receive. This was correlated to Chekhov's strong belief that actors had a desire for transformation into characters that were not like themselves (Chekhov 1991, cassette 1). His form of embodied play is built on this exploration of transformation and an exploration of difference between themselves and someone, or something, different to the actor's own 'everyday self'.

The idea of visualising and embodying the character in stillness prior to movement combined with the intensity of the level of embodied engagement in this form of play with the Imaginary Centre, appears to 'jolt' the actor imaginatively out of their own personal embodied-emotional patterns and paves the way for a lessening of the habitual. Significantly this was also identified as a quality of children's play by Vygotsky in the 1930s. He argues that play creates a space/place of optimal learning for the child which he calls the zone of proximal development that is facilitated by the rules of play. As he explains:

This kind of subordination to rules is quite impossible in life, but in play it does become possible; thus, play also creates the zone of proximal development of the child. In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself...play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form; in play it is as though the child were trying to jump above the level of his normal behaviour.

(Vygotsky 1976, p.552)

Whilst adults are clearly not at the same developmental stage as children, it is a valid argument that this form of embodied play still generates a zone of 'proximal development' for the actor which enables them to move beyond, or 'jump above', their own daily and normative behaviour. As Brown notes: 'Because play is all about trying on new behaviours and thoughts, it frees us from established patterns' (2009, p.92). In Chekhov's play it is these imaginative-embodied jolts or jumps above, or away from, the actor's self based behaviour and ego, are the key mechanism for transformation and engagement with difference.

## **2.6 Play and Ego Control**

This jumping beyond the personal and everyday is also related to the way in which Chekhov's (and Bing's) forms of embodied play require actors to relinquish some of the ego-control in the creative process. To play with an Imaginary Centre actors are required to invest in, and trust, the game structure (the Imaginary Centre) as a type of external 'partner' in the act of creation. This notion of placing a trust in, and being able to be led by not only other actors, but also non-human external 'partners' (i.e. imaginary bodies/centres, other objects, rhythms, real/imaginary spaces, atmospheres, elements, colours, etc.) is also key to the form of embodied play developed by Chekhov. It also shares features with the form of play developed by Bing and her collaborators. This requires the actor to nurture creative subjective experience to create, or engage with, this non-human play partner, but to also be able to objectify 'it' (and 'it' in you) imaginatively, in order to play with 'it' further, is something that appears to recur in this nexus of

embodied play. In this context, we can see why Chekhov argued that in some ways the imagination can be seen to exist 'independently' of the actor (an Imaginary Centre, an Objective Atmosphere, etc.). This indicates a complex blurring between what we would generally regard as subjective and objective experience, which is also a feature of children's play that was noted by Winnicott (1991, p.50). Turner also discusses the problem with overly simplistic divisions of subjective and objective in relation to the way in which play is contrasted with notions of work:

The distinction between "subjective" and "objective" may itself be partly an artefact of the sundering of work and play. For "work" is held to be the realm of the rational adaptation of means to ends, of "objectivity", while "play" is thought of as divorced from this essentially "objective" realm, and, in so far as it is its inverse, it is "subjective", free from external constraints, where any and every combination of variable can be "played" with.

(Turner 1982, p.34)

In this context it is important to try to deconstruct Chekhov's desire to find what he termed "objective techniques". Chekhov's playful methods are all dependent on the actor's subjective imagination and so can perhaps never be considered 'objective' in the positivistic sense, but what he starts to try to tease apart are the different types of performer technique in relation to the self and one's own emotions and memories in the hope of finding a different way of using/understanding the actor's ego along with a way of creating a level of distance at certain points, and to varying levels of intensity, in performance. This is a complex aspect of this experience as actors are being led by the Centre, which whilst it is their own invention, then becomes something slightly separate to them; 'it' leads them in their experiments.

The relinquishing of a level of ego control is central to the use of the Imaginary Centre, and Chekhov's practice in general as discussed by Daboo (2007), Aspherger (2008) and Zarrilli (2009) and is also reminiscent to one of the

features of flow identified in relation to play. Daboo discusses what Chekhov defines as a 'sense of joy' when fully absorbed in the creative process and she cites his papers from the Dartington archive where he explains this is derived from: '1) a release from my own personality; and 2) awareness of the enactment of the creative idea which would otherwise remain out of the grasp of my everyday consciousness' (Chekhov 1983, p.32) (Cited in Daboo 2007, pp. 269-271). She argues that actors engaging with Chekhov technique also escape a rigid sense of 'I' through the embodied movement of the practice. She argues that this 'leads to getting the "self" out of the way' (2007, p.271). The management of the pleasure of Flow and also the ability to reflect or create distance (Non-Flow, i.e. when you perceive it from outside) is also a core aspect of this ego control and a requirement for successful use of the Imaginary Centre. Chekhov explained that the Divided Consciousness should be used in the later (fourth) stages of exploration and rehearsal (1991, p.155) after exploratory work with these forms of embodied play (visualization, objective atmosphere, imaginary body/centre, psychological gesture etc). Playing with a Divided Consciousness at various points means that while the actor can empathize with the imagined realities of the character she is not lost within this emotional zone, and Chekhov notes that 'although the actor on stage suffers, weeps, rejoices and laughs, at the same time he remains unaffected by these feelings on a personal level' (Chekhov 2005, p.147). He also argues that it is at the moment when the actor's 'higher ego' partially disengages with the 'everyday ego' that this sort division of consciousness, or a different form of embodied consciousness, occurs. This idea of being both within and without the play experience at different points may be a central facet of play, as Vygotsky noted exactly the same phenomenon in children's play (1933/1966). There is therefore a dynamic interplay between these different levels and types of embodied play consciousness at various points in the practice and it is therefore almost impossible to articulate as a general and rigid principle for all actors as they will each experience it differently, at different times, and to a different intensity. However, Chekhov's various forms of embodied play, including the Imaginary



Centre, act as catalysts to facilitate this imaginative-embodied jump that transforms the actor out of their 'everyday self' into a state of play consciousness which requires both flow and Divided Consciousness.

## **2.7 Creating with the Imaginary Centre**

Significantly, Chekhov's Imaginary Centre can be used to freely invent characters, totally independent of any text, or can be used to develop a character from non theatrical texts (1991, 2002). In this context the games with the Imaginary Centre enable actors to freely invent characters using the Imaginary Body and Centre. This becomes a form of what I am terming 'extended' play as they train the actor in play which allows for liberated creation, not just the interpretation of pre-existing play-based characters. His notion of moving beyond the text and playwright's invention also means that even when the actor is interpreting a pre-existing play script she is actually creating through forms of embodied play. Chekhov also playfully suggests that actors set themselves a game of rapid invention: '[Set yourself] the task of creating five different characters in half an hour, one after the other...Try to find their Imaginary Bodies and characteristic Centres. Find their speech and typical actions...Then shorten the time to twenty-five minutes, then to twenty minutes' (1991, p.106). This develops not only the actors' ability to use this form of play as a springboard to create characters but the increasingly tight time restraints further pushes them to improve their spontaneous reactions, their capacity for *disponibilité* and stamina in the game. The way in which this form of play is 'extended' therefore develops the actor's capacity to create independently of an existing play script. This use of play as a trigger for creativity is also something that Murray identifies as central to Lecoq's later notion of *Le Jeu*:

play is the *driver* of creativity. Without a disposition – and ability – to play it is impossible to produce the conditions whereby the actor/performer is a creator rather than simply interpreter. While the

divisions between being a *creative* as opposed to an *interpretative* actor are neither rigid or impermeable, Lecoq is proposing a model of performing where the actor is the (co-) author-maker of material whether it is physical, spoken, musical or imagistic'

(Murray 2010, p.223)

Chekhov very intentionally wanted to train actors who were collaborative and empowered creative actors in their own right and it is therefore not surprising that his particular use of embodied play became 'extended' in this way. This is a lynchpin in his overall method as it helps him to train actors as artists and creators in their own rights and will be discussed further in Chapter 5. This training in/use of extended play led to small-scale Studio based performances generated by these 'creators' and ultimately professional productions that were built on early forms of what Chamberlain (2004, p.85) correctly identifies as devising processes.

### **3. Other Methods of Embodied Play**

The above analysis has considered how Chekhov's method of the Imaginary Centre operates as a form of embodied play in some detail. However, I am arguing that Chekhov's other techniques are differently, but equally, based on uses of imaginatively embodied play. Whilst space does not permit a discussion of all the techniques to the same level, a brief overview of some of how some of his contrasting methods function might be helpful. These include playing with Psychological Gesture, Objective Atmosphere and playing as Clowns. It will also point to certain other techniques which share similarities to the work developed by Bing and Copeau in relation to play.

#### **3.1 Playing with Psychological Gesture**

Chekhov's use of the Psychological Gesture can also be analysed as a highly embodied and expressive form of play that can be used in relation to a character or in relation to scenes or sections of material for a company. It is ironic

to note that Chamberlain (2000) claims that Chekhov's 'most original' contribution to acting technique was the psychological gesture, whilst Chekhov discusses the development of this technique very openly in relation to work he did with Vakhtangov and Stanislavsky which negates the idea of purist originality but indicates hybridity and exchange. Chekhov claims that when Vakhtangov directed him in *Eric XIV* 'neither of us knew about these things, but somehow we were both driving towards the archetype of the [psychological] gesture' (Chekhov 1985, p.118). He also acknowledged that this was something that Stanislavsky was working with, albeit not in a conscious manner:

When Stanislavsky was producing *The Inspector General*, he did not ever speak to me about gestures or archetypes, but he suggested the following psychological trick which was later the key to the part. He suggested that I start to catch things, and to drop them suddenly. So he gave me the key to the psychology of the Inspector General...Just the same, one simple gesture can be found for the character of the Inspector General which includes everything.

(Chekhov 1985, pp. 118-119)

What is interesting is the way in which Chekhov drew on work he had carried out with his collaborators but developed and changed the various techniques over time and, I would argue, one of the fundamental differences is his more radical application of play which enabled a much broader use of these types of Gesture for different purposes. Chekhov believed that using movement/action, what he terms Psychological Gesture, a full-body, strong and well-shaped (archetypal) movement that captures the essence of the character, is the most useful way of identifying, refining and exercising their main 'desires' (2002, p.63), or 'objectives' (1991, p.111). In his technique the actor playfully discovers that the 'kind of movement' they make will 'awaken and animate in you a definite desire, want or wish' for the character (2002, p.63).

Chekhov developed this playfully expressive physical method, which appeals to the actor's 'creative forces directly' (ibid, p.67) and through intuitive trial and

error, in direct contradistinction to an intellectual process of identifying an objective based on early textual analysis, which he argues: 'cannot be of use to the actor' (1991, p.108). Rather, he suggests:

[...] Act spontaneously several times, then as yourself ask, "What have I done? What was I aiming at?" This is to search for the Objective by appealing to one's Will. Here again, before knowing what the Objective is, we experience it. While freely acting so many moments or scenes, the actor must keep a "spying eye" upon himself. Whether the answer comes while you are acting or afterward, it will arise from the realm of your Will, avoiding the sphere of your intellectual reasoning.

(Chekhov 1991, p.109)

He argues that the actor's intuition, creative imagination and artistic vision of the character prior to detailed textual analysis must be trusted, as in his other methods of play. Indeed he suggests that they can work with 'just a guess' but 'you can rely on it and use it as a springboard for your first attempt to build the PG' (2002, p.67). He points out that working this way actors 'soon discover whether your first guess as to the main desire of the character was correct. The PG [i.e. this process of embodied play] itself will lead you to the discovery, without too much interference on the part of the reasoning mind' (ibid). He argues: 'If we are producing these gestures, then we are accumulating, like a magnet, all the big and small particles which are coming to us, because we are occupied in these gestures, therefore, our talent is freed to such an extent that it will not remain silent, but will speak immediately (Chekhov 1985, p.110). The Psychological Gesture is a very flexible form of play as it can be used for a character as whole, parts of the role, for difference scenes or speeches. It can also be used by the ensemble in relation to sections or scenes in performance as a form of play-based analysis which will be discussed in Chapter 5. Crucially, he explains Psychological Gesture can also be found for characters that actors have created in their imagination (2002, pp.74-75), once again offering the possibility of 'extending' this form of play.

### 3.2 Playing with Objective Atmosphere

Objective Atmosphere is useful in that it works quite differently to the Imaginary Body and Imaginary Centre and Chekhov argues that they can be used 'most successfully by a group' (2002, p.58). Whilst working with Objective Atmosphere can seem highly 'intangible' it provides very 'tangible' forms of embodied play. Chekhov believes that working creatively with Objective Atmosphere 'arouses new feelings and fresh creative impulses' in actors (ibid, p.50) and is also a key aspect of his technique which connects the actors to the spectators. Chekhov argues that 'atmospheres are limitless and to be found everywhere. Every landscape, every street, every house, room; a library, a hospital, a cathedral, a noisy restaurant [...] every phenomenon and event has its own particular atmospheres' (ibid, p.48). He explains that in life we, often unwittingly, change 'movements, speech, behaviour, thoughts and feelings as soon as you create a strong, contagious atmosphere' (ibid, p.49). For this form of play to work Chekhov points out that actors have to give themselves to it 'wholly' and when they do they will 'soon feel a kind of creative activity engendered within himself' (ibid, p.50).

This form of play once again provides a set of 'rules' for the actor, but they can be played with in various different ways. Chekhov explains that Objective Atmospheres work by having a direct impact on the character's embodiment (therefore also their psychology). For example, he argues that an atmosphere of happiness awakens a desire in the actor to psychophysically 'expand, extend, open [...] take space', whilst an atmosphere of depression or grief triggers the reverse in imaginatively-embodied terms (2002, p.50). He also talks of the actor needing to follow the 'will' of the Objective Atmosphere. Playing, even the most simple of games, with this Objective Atmosphere enables actors to discover its 'inner dynamic, life and will' (ibid, p.51). This form of play can also become more complex when it is used in combination with other games, i.e. actors could work

with their Imaginary Centres and explore Objective Atmospheres. Chekhov's discussion of the common mistakes actors make when using this technique exemplify some of the same play principles as the Imaginary Body and Centre:

Avoid two possible mistakes. Don't be impatient to "perform" or "act" the atmosphere with your movement. Don't deceive yourself; have confidence in the power of the atmosphere and imagine it and woo it long enough [...], and then move your arm and hand *within* it. Another possible mistake you may make is trying to *force yourself to feel* the atmosphere. Try to avoid such an effort. You *will* feel it around and within you as soon as you concentrate your attention on it properly. It will stir your feelings by itself, without any unnecessary and disturbing violence on your part.

(Chekhov 2002, p.56)

Playing with the Objective Atmosphere clearly requires the actors to be very open and available to this form of play; it requires a similar semi-autotelic approach and produces a similar form of reduced focus that the Imaginary Centre provides. It can also be used as a basis for playful analysis of play texts.

### 3.3 Playing as Clowns

Despite Chekhov's dissatisfaction with Max Reinhardt's rehearsal process and the quality and style of the performances when he was to work with him on three productions in Germany, he clearly made some important discoveries whilst performing Skid, a clown, in the production of *Artists* by Watters and Hopkins (1928). Chekhov reflects on how he experienced, and was able to articulate, his experience of Divided Consciousness whilst working on this character (2005). However, in the context of this study we should note that this period of playing Skid also gave Chekhov time to reflect on the art of clowning in general, a mode of performance that is rooted in embodied play, and was to become an important aspect of his technique in later years. This interest in clowning clearly correlates to a much freer and expressive type of physical play and the development of a sense of humour (and the capacity to laugh at oneself) that Chekhov felt all actors should

have, but is also of fundamental importance in relation to the ways in which actors learn about playing with an audience. In *To The Actor* (2002) in his discussion of different types of performance he specifically addresses clowning and he suggests that actors 'consider the humorous retinue of the clown as consisting of *subhuman* beings' (p.128), which arguably also has an affinity to a more overt play with animality. He reflects that the clown's 'transitions from one emotion to the other do not require any psychological justifications' but goes on to point out that this does not mean that 'the clown is permitted to be inwardly untrue and insincere! Quite the opposite. He has to *believe* in what he feels and does' (ibid, p.129). Chekhov argues that '[c]lowning, extreme though it is, can be an indispensable adjunct to the actor' (ibid) and it is arguable that it leads to some very different forms of explicit and physical playing, which he believed operated on two levels concurrently i.e. both tragedy and humour (19/01/1937 'The Two Clowns' MC/S1/7). Chekhov also thought that clowning re-connected actors to an element of the 'child' which he believed was always present in adults. Playing as clowns therefore enables actors to engage with the qualities he had identified with the metaphor of naiveté, i.e. it helps actors to work with simplicity, trust, humour and humility (see Petit 2010, Ashperger 2008). It can also demand a very clear and explicit play with the audience themselves.

These three additional brief examples demonstrate the various different ways that embodied play operates in Chekhov's techniques. It should also be noted that a number of his other techniques also display certain affinities with the embodied methods of play that were developed by Bing et al, such as the Movement Qualities of Moulding, Floating (or Flowing), Flying and Radiating which can be considered in relation to the French practitioners play with the elements. His techniques working with rhythm (and tempo-rhythm), music and ensemble movement improvisation (including unison work) are also similar to the forms of play developed by Bing that will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

#### **4. A Playful Technique**

As noted in Chapter 2, in his publications Chekhov did not specify an exact order for his exercises, or games, in training but rather presents a flexible technique, which he believes actors must make their own (1985, p.82). He recognised that all artists are different, with different interests and backgrounds, partly through his experience of working with a wide range of actors in different parts of the world. As noted previously, Pitches (2006) compares Stanislavsky's development of actor training based on 'hard science' to Chekhov's 'soft science' and uses the visual metaphor of a circular web of interconnected techniques for the approach of the latter (p.113). The flexibility of this web of interconnected techniques seems to represent an approach that is able to encompass, and use, embodied play in these methods, and which led to more extended and radical forms of play. When an actor has made substantial discoveries using these various different forms of embodied play, for example the Imaginary Centre, they become what he defines as 'incorporated' in a psychophysical sense and the game might be 'dropped'. Actors can attempt to incorporate their Imaginary Body or Imaginary Centre in a sequential manner, or in one go, this is another decision that is left to the actor. At some point actors will go on to work more closely with a different form of play/technique (or combination), but they can always return to the Imaginary Centre, or other method of play, and use it as a 'ground' in rehearsal and Chekhov stresses that further work may reveal the necessity to change the earlier conception of the Imaginary Centre. He is relaxed about how actors choose to use and combine these various forms of games and believes that this should be determined by the actor, as well as the director (Chekhov 2002). What is now apparent is that we cannot fully consider his flexible and interconnected approach, or individual 'methods', without recognising the way in which embodied and relational play underpins this practice.



## 5. Playful Analysis

In addition to the actor engaging in a relational exchange with their Imaginary Body and Imaginary Centre as something connected to them, yet slightly removed like a mask, they are also encouraged to use it in relation to the other actors. As discussed, all of Chekhov's work is related to a high level of ensemble practice and the notion of actors working in relation to what he terms the Whole. He admired, and adopted, Vakhtangov's ability to cultivate a special working language with his actors in which they learnt to 'embody their thoughts and feelings in images and exchange them with one another, thus replacing long, boring and pointlessly clever conversations about the part, the play or whatever' (Chekhov 2005, p.70) and ensemble work with the Imaginary Centre certainly achieves this. In addition, he stresses that the work that actors create always changes when it is explored in relation to the other character/actors. Chekhov explains '[t]hinking that a character always remains the same while meeting other characters is a crucial mistake' (2002, p.137). This, of course, applies to actors playing with their Imaginary Bodies and Centres, and other 'grounds' and 'games', together and how this will feed into a process of discovery and change. Ultimately, the work generated through the use of the Imaginary Centre is shared with, and modified by, the audience who Chekhov perceives as the co-creators of the work. In effect then, the actor plays in the final performance, and with the audience. This is an aspect of his embodied play that is never forgotten by Chekhov and in this sense it mirrors Bing and Copeau's perspective on the audience (in particular the work they produced after the closure of the Vieux-Colombier in Paris). In Lecoq's more recent terms, actors engaging with Chekhov's form of embodied play are also entering into a state of Complicité within the ensemble and with the audience.

The use of the Imaginary Centre demonstrates how Chekhov's form of embodied play not only lead to the development of a character and the discovery of performance action, but also offers original, playful, intuitive and synthetic forms

of 'analysis' of the chosen material, what Chekhov terms 'non-materialistic analysis' (04/06/1936 LTT MC/S1/7). This will be discussed in Chapter 5.

## **6. Chekhov's Play-enabling Style**

Inextricably bound to Chekhov's use of various methods of play in his technique was his development of a very specific style of teaching and directing, in this context a way of working as an enabler of play. His style did not evolve in a vacuum but rather within the context of complex genealogy of innovative artists from Russia and other parts of the world. The contrast between what Chekhov reports was Sulerzhitsky's style and Stanislavsky's whilst he was working in Russia is extreme and it is clear that it was the former who heavily influenced Chekhov's pedagogic and directorial style. We also need to recall that it was Sulerzhitsky and Vakhtangov who were to develop what Frost and Yarrow (2007) define as improvisation 'proper' at the MAT and this is clearly pivotal to the development of a use of embodied play by Chekhov. Chekhov cites Sulerzhitsky's inspirational ability to lead a group of actors, retaining respect and authority whilst giving them creative freedom, as significant to his own development. Chekhov reflects that what he learnt from Sulerzhitsky's example in Russia was that 'to lead means to serve those who are being led and not to demand service on their part' (Chekhov 2005, p.52). He similarly admired, and adopted, Vakhtangov's ability to imagine and engage with the audience (similar to a sense of *Complicité*) and, as has been discussed previously, the way in which he cultivated a visual and embodied working language with his actors which was not dependent on long intellectual discussions (ibid, p. 70). Indeed I have argued that Chekhov also achieves this with his forms of embodied play, which is exemplified in this case by the Imaginary Centre.

Related to this was Vakhtangov and Chekhov's interest in style, form and theatricality and their resistance to the dominance of Naturalism. This is important

as Chekhov's form of embodied play can be (and in his opinion, should be) applied to very different stylistic practices. It also has to be given the space to allow actors to engage in play with fantastic characters, nature, non-human and non-rational transformations. Indeed Chekhov argues that Naturalism limits the actors' imagination and we can see why this would be too limiting for his form of expressive embodied play. He argues:

The actor-artist will understand that style is the most precious thing that he brings into his work that is something which ultimately makes being a creative artist worthwhile. He will understand that naturalism is not art, for the artist cannot bring anything from himself into a naturalistic 'work of art', that his task in such a case is limited to his ability to copy 'nature' more or less exactly.

(Chekhov 2005, p.42)

As noted in Chapter 2, Chekhov also advocates an exploration of a wide range of genres and styles of performance including: tragedy; drama; melodrama; comedy; high comedy; farce; slapstick comedy; clowning (2002, p.123); and *commedia dell'arte* (du Prey 1978). This expands the frames for embodied play and also closely connects to Chekhov's notion of Gesture and Form and how actors need to 'play' with this in all aspects of their work. The expressive play with Gesture and Form requires an embodied, physical/gestural, spatial and compositional awareness in the actor and like Ease, The Whole and Beauty (the other qualities referred to as the Four Brothers) is linked to all the techniques Chekhov developed. Chekhov explains Form in the following way: 'The feeling of form that I have in mind is, of course, the outer form starting with our body – we must try to meditate upon our own body as a form, to experience it as a form' (Chekhov 1985, p.82). He argues that when actors are able to awaken this sense of their body as a form, it allows them to receive inspiration from their bodies, i.e. they can engage in embodied play. This playful expression of gesture and form is possible, but arguably restricted, if the practice is dominated by Naturalism. This broader theatrical frame for embodied play, and an interest in movement and form, also mirrors the practice of Bing and Copeau, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 4.

Whilst Chekhov always had great respect for Stanislavsky and, as has been extensively discussed by numerous commentators, borrowed aspects of his system, he undoubtedly rebelled against his former director and teacher's pedagogic and directorial style. He argues: 'The tragedy of Stanislavsky was that he had no understanding of what it meant to be a teacher. He was never able to find the way in which to give his knowledge to others. He was a great inventor, but as a teacher and director, he was very ungifted. He could demonstrate, but he could not teach' (13/04/1936, LTT MC\S1\7). In addition he argued, 'Stanislavsky tortured all the actors around him, and he tortured himself even more than us. He was a very difficult and strange teacher, and perhaps a very heartless and merciless teacher [...] he has perhaps not found the right way for his teaching' (04/07/1938, *The Actor is the Theatre*, MC/S1/7/B). This critique also extended to his directorial style, as Marowitz explains: 'The rehearsals for the Gogol [*The Inspector General*] were many and, in Chekhov's words, "for the most part, excruciating." Stanislavsky often confused teaching with directing and tended to treat senior members of the company as if they were fledgling students' (Marowitz 2004, p.63). Marowitz goes on to explain that during one rehearsal when Chekhov and other actors slightly muddled their lines '[Stanislavsky's] stern, cold voice from the auditorium boomed, "Stop! You will repeat your lines thirteen times!" And with Stanislavsky tapping his finger on the desk to mark each representation, the actors duly recited them aloud like schoolchildren' (2004, p.63). Chekhov's own pedagogic and directorial approach offers a radical polarity to Stanislavsky's approach, the latter arguably would not have been suited to enabling collaborative and radical play.

Steiner's use of play in his radical pedagogy has been discussed but it is worth also recalling his belief that teachers needed to be artists in their own right, and Chekhov certainly advised his teachers to apply his play-full techniques to their teaching. In other words, in order to be able to enable other actor's play, the

teacher/director needs to be able to play (improvise, imagine, intuit) themselves and draw on Chekhov's techniques to help them do this. Consequently, the play-enabler has to also work with a flexible sense of *disponibilité* and *complicité* with their actors. Therefore, Chekhov's style as a teacher and director is in marked contrast to Stanislavsky and Copeau and was arguably less patriarchal and controlling. Pitches' visual metaphors are useful again as they can be seen to apply to the pedagogic style and power structures utilized by the two men, in addition to the structure of their overall approaches. Whereas Stanislavsky's practice was based on a clear hierarchical structure, a linear shape with power held by the director/teacher at the top and actor as interpreter at the bottom, Chekhov's circle indicates different types of inter-connection and no notion of strict beginning/top or end/bottom and indicates a more collaborative and less hierarchical set of relationships. As Chekhov explained 'My ideal has always been not to be a despotic leader, but to lead with your help' (Cited in Ashperger 2008, p.95) and as Powers noted, Chekhov often referred to his students as his 'colleagues' (1992) which is telling in this respect.

Chekhov's style of play-enabling in both training and theatre-making processes was clearly built upon a deep respect for the actor and an ability to trust their use of embodied play as artists. Simon Callow argues that, in contrast to Stanislavsky who 'did not trust actors or their impulses believing that unless they were carefully monitored by themselves and by their teachers and directors, they would lapse into grotesque overacting or mere mechanical repetition', Chekhov fundamentally trusted actors and believed that: 'the more actors trusted themselves and were trusted, the more extraordinary the work they would produce. For him, the child playing in front of his nanny, improvising wildly, generating emotions with easy spontaneity, changing shape according to the impulses of his fantasy, was the paradigm of the actor' (Callow in Chekhov 2002, p.xviii). The empowerment of the actor in this process is paramount and this is facilitated

through their forms of play. Chekhov's discussion of the Imaginary Centre exemplifies this clearly:

Never ask anybody whether your idea about the centre is right or correct, use your own judgement; trust your intuition, your imagination, your talent. Of course you might take into consideration your director's suggestion and alter your ideal conception of the centre, but there is no need to doubt your own judgement. If for instance this centre you found satisfies you, or amuses you, then be sure it is correct. Besides I can see the centre, in this or that particular person, or a character, in my way, the other [person] will see it his way. It is creative work and there are no mathematical, logical approaches to it. Create it and see that you are happy. That is all that is needed [...] please do not toil with this centre, take it just as simply as it is. Enjoy it, play with it like a child would play with its ball.

(Chekhov 1991, Cassette 1)

In effect this gives the actor's creative discoveries through play as much weight as the director's ideas. The actor can 'take into consideration' the director's suggestions but Chekhov is fundamentally urging them to trust the game itself. In this context a director may be leading the process but they are also required to enable this type of ensemble and collaborative play. It can therefore be argued that directing in this context becomes a form of play-enabling.

Allowing space for the actor to engage in embodied play as an artist in this way requires a form of teaching, directing, or enabling, which requires careful observation and encouragement, and an ability to understand them as well as challenge them. Indeed, as noted previously, Chamberlain argues that Chekhov was 'a very gentle' teacher who clearly challenged his students but 'did not torment his students or overly criticize them' (2004, p.28). It also suggests that although Stanislavsky and Copeau held the most structural power in relation to their theatre companies and associated schools, they clearly did not necessarily have the appropriate skills or styles to enable play in the way that Bing and Chekhov did. Chekhov's play-based approach to theatre-making provides a more playful and less hierarchical relationship to the text, the role of the writer, and systems of

performance making. Chekhov proposed, and used, a much more collaborative model, which as Chamberlain noted was a radical process in the 1930s (2004, p.85). It would also appear therefore that the use of these different forms of embodied play can ultimately result in the challenge to a rigid dominance of the play text and creates a space for different forms of performance making that places the various meaning-making elements (i.e. embodied performance) into a more dynamic and equitable system. In turn, these new ways of making theatre changed the way in which the roles of actor, director and writer operate and to some extent started to challenge traditional hierarchies.

Chekhov discusses the qualities necessary for a teacher of his technique very clearly in these terms: 'She must be alive, she must be loving, she must be active, more creative, she must have more freedom with her material, more form, more power, more fire and vitality' (01/05/1936, LTT MC/S1/7). He goes on to argue that teachers should also radiate a feeling of security, understanding and truth (07/05/1936, *ibid*). Whilst Lecoq and his former students and collaborators often use a form of play-enabling which is based in *via negativa*, this is evidently not the only style of play-enabling that can produce embodied play and embodied theatre as Chekhov's approach was different in many respects. On some levels Chekhov's approach is more in line with the accounts of Bing's style of play-enabling which will be addressed in Chapter 4 and in some respects can be understood as more 'feminine' in a loose borrowing from Cixous (1975, 2010) as discussed in the preface. Both Chekhov and Bing were arguably less threatened by the notion of giving creative power and freedom to actors through the use of these techniques and committed to developing a very specific way of enabling play. Their forms of embodied play, and play-enabling, present a more gentle and collaborative, yet radical challenge, to the more hierarchal, controlling and patriarchal ways of working developed by Stanislavsky and Copeau. This required a high level of observation and a willingness to create spaces for discoveries in play which do not always centre on reason and rationality, and that are based in

the body. While they were both reportedly very demanding teachers, Chekhov's personal style as a teacher and director was very gentle and affirming this reminds us of Cixous' argument that some men are not 'afraid of femininity' (2010, p.38) although she noted in the 1970s that there were far too few of them. This also indicates that there are different ways of enabling play in contrast to not only the earlier 'Master-Teachers' but also the more recent style drawing on *via negativa* used by Lecoq and in particular Gaulier who, as Kendrick notes 'inflicts physical punishment' in addition to 'verbal abuse' on his students (2011, p. 80).

## **7. Different Routes to an Embodied Play Consciousness**

This chapter has argued that Chekhov's form of embodied play helps to 'jolt' the actor in imaginatively-embodied terms into a distinctly different, non-everyday, consciousness where they are able to 'jump above' their everyday capability and use their ego differently. It is necessary to consider this further in relation to other ideas about play and neutrality. Frost and Yarrow (2007) argue that the way in which Chekhov created a distance from the everyday self, through his 'Higher Ego' (or Higher Self / Divided Consciousness) suggests:

...parallels with Copeau's and Lecoq's work on 'neutrality' [...] but also with non-Western actor training rooted in particular understandings of mind/body integration and models of consciousness. Chekhov himself also used aspects of eurythmy (Steiner/Dalcroze), and worked with Vakhtangov to synthesise the approaches of Stanislavsky and Meyerhold.

(2007, p.25)

They go on to claim that:

These criteria exemplify important improvisatory principles and form a link between the psychological and inner-directed end of the Stanislavsky spectrum and the kinds of spatial and element work partly derived from dance and mime blanche, but also figuring extensively in Lecoq's sport-derived methodology.

(ibid)



Notwithstanding this problematic confusion about the two very different practices of Eurythmy and Eurythmics which should not be conflated, Frost and Yarrow do identify a parallel with Chekhov's techniques in terms of mind/body integration, less habitual forms of acting and different forms of consciousness, which this analysis supports. However, this analysis of the Imaginary Centre as an exemplar of how one of Chekhov's embodied play methods indicates that it may not be helpful for us to pull this nexus of practice, and a distinctly different form of consciousness, purely back towards the technique or notion of Neutrality. We also need to remember that Lecoq argues there is 'no such thing as absolute and universal neutrality' (2000, p.2), rather he notes that is rather a 'temptation'. However he notes that whilst it might be a metaphoric desire this does not lessen the efficacy of it as a creative tool which reduces the socialized and habitual.

What has become known as Neutrality has a tendency to rest on what we have identified as the problematic dichotomy of purity and innocence versus experience, which we have seen is not necessarily a fundamental dimension Chekhov's play practice. It would seem that the actor accesses this type of 'Higher Self' consciousness through Chekhov's form of embodied play that, whilst similar to the French tradition, is different in a number of important respects. Neutrality can be used to strip away actor's everyday consciousness to enable them to enter this playful state built on *disponibilité* and although Chekhov's embodied play also encourages actors to move away from the habitual it does this very differently (Crossing the Threshold and using the Ideal Centre, both of which are seen as imagined states) and, as we have seen with the Imaginary Centre, also works by enabling actors to visualise and also imaginatively-embodiment a 'jump' into a different type of consciousness or form of expressive engagement. Bing's use of the noble mask and neutrality cannot be completely conflated with Lecoq's more recent ideas and techniques of Neutrality. Therefore, I would argue that there are clearly different routes to a similar creative play consciousness. We also need to understand that whilst the notion of divided or dual consciousness is necessary for

these forms of embodied play, and its related altered state of consciousness, actors are moving between experiences of flow and the ability to create a sense of distance, and see their practice from the outside. They are also moving between free and structured play and are playing in various different ways. It is more complex than simply using dual consciousness.

Evans discusses Yarrow's definition of Neutral Consciousness (1986) which is based on the notion of body/mind integration:

This mind/body connectedness is conceptualised by Ralph Yarrow as 'neutral' consciousness (Yarrow, 1986). Yarrow understands consciousness as 'integral to all knowing' (1986:1), but is specifically interested in the extent to which it may, under specific circumstances, occur physiologically, opening out consciousness into a 'universality of awareness' (1986:2). Implicit in this conception is a suspension of judgement and an openness and readiness...rationalization obstructs the operation of this flow of psychophysical energies. There is a consequent move away from a dominantly rational and intellectual approach, towards one that prioritizes readiness, availability and openness above premeditation.

(Evans 2009, p.87)

Yarrow's claims that Neutral Consciousness is 'integral to all knowing', and opens the actor's consciousness to the 'universality of awareness', appears to wed this discussion to a universalistic and specifically mystical ideology. It also suggests that the mind/body connection is related to the use of Neutrality, whereas this analysis has revealed that this open, and less rational, embodied play consciousness, can be arrived at by different means. However, the discussion about a move away from a dominantly rational and intellectual approach to one that centres on openness and readiness (*disponibilité*) and other key qualities seem more appropriately applied to Chekhov and Bing's earlier methods. Evans' interpretation indicates that Yarrow believes that Neutral Consciousness can suspend judgement for the actor, but this is a very large and somewhat problematic claim. The point of agreement would be that this type of consciousness certainly lessens the actor's everyday systems of judgement and

gives them increased imagined-embodied flexibility and some of the qualities related to the metaphor of naiveté. Evans' development of this notion of an alternative consciousness into what he terms Active Consciousness is certainly more useful.

Let us suppose that 'neutral' body training allows the actor to develop what might be termed an 'active consciousness' – a state in which the actor can engage spontaneously in the dramatic moment and at the same time maintain the level of consciousness required to allow the body to signify to itself. 'Active consciousness' is in this sense a distinctly theatrical form of consciousness. Without consciousness the mind and body would be one, operating in immediate response to the surrounding environment, but would not be capable of grappling with meaning. The actor seeks lively spontaneous action, which must simultaneously be brought to their consciousness to begin to give it significance. This complex set of contradictions also reveals important ways in which movement and the experience of the body in performance can be a site for difference.

(Evans 2009, p.102)

He later suggests that certain forms of movement training can perhaps 'usefully function to help bridge the 'doing/thinking' divide (Evans 2009, p.15). My study indicates that this consciousness is accessed through processes of play whether in relation to the various approaches within the French tradition or in Chekhov's different methods.

As noted, we also need to be careful that we do not conflate Bing and Copeau's earlier experiments with play and the noble mask with Lecoq's later approach to Neutrality. Wright notes the difference between Lecoq's use of Neutral mask and Neutrality to that used by the earlier practitioners: 'by re-defining [the noble mask] as a 'neutral mask' Lecoq has developed an important concept that has become fundamental to his pedagogy as a whole' (Wright 2002, p.75). Whilst Bing was to develop their various methods of embodied play in tandem to using the noble mask, she and Copeau had been extensively using play prior to their development of that mask. Their use of character mask was also important to

their play but it works very differently to the noble, or neutral mask. It would therefore seem that whilst their work with the noble mask was to become a very important aspect of their practice, it was perhaps just one strand within their broader methods of play rather than the cornerstone to everything. Indeed, Murray's recent (2010) discussion of the practices of Lecoq in relation to his two former students, and later fellow teachers, Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier is useful in this context. Murray considers the differences in how these three practitioners work in relation to an 'umbrella of play' (2002 p. 222) and this demonstrates how the current French play practice is not actually monolithic. He notes 'There is a sense in which the role of neutral mask within Lecoq's curriculum serves a similar purpose to Gaulier's opening course, 'Le Jeu'. Whilst Gaulier also offers a course on the neutral mask later in his sequence, both invite the student to open themselves up to the world of nature, objects and materials' (Murray 2010, p.231). What is useful is the way in which Murray notes that actually Lecoq and Gaulier start their actor training differently but the key shared starting point is that they 'open up' the actors to themselves as players and to the wider, external 'world of nature, objects and materials'. Murray's point is that different approaches can 'serve a similar purpose' in relation to the umbrella of play, and this study is demonstrating that Chekhov's approach, which does not necessarily engage with Neutrality in the same way in which Lecoq does also enables actors to engage with a specific type of play consciousness. It is now clearly time to move beyond a rigid linking of this type of embodied play to Lecoq's notion of Le Jeu and his very specific use of Neutrality.

To conclude, this analysis of Chekhov's Imaginary Centre adds to, challenges, and diversifies, the current discourse on play in relation to historical and contemporary embodied theatre practices. The proposition that an expandable term of embodied play, and the related notion of an embodied play consciousness, may be more useful to contemporary performance has been presented. A crucial question is: what remains, or has become more attractive

about Chekhov's approach to contemporary practitioners? I would argue that to a number of artists who work under Murray & Keefe's (2007) umbrella term of Physical Theatres it is Chekhov's specifically imaginatively-embodied use of play, and concomitantly the way in which this can turn actors into artists and creators in their own right (rather than remaining interpreters) that has become increasingly attractive. As we have seen Chekhov's forms of embodied play can be used in relation to pre-existing play scripts, but can also be used as a form of theatre-making in a freer sense. The playful nature of Chekhov's technique can be seen as brought to the fore by the work of contemporary artists and teachers including Petit, Zinder, Wright and McDermott, although all of them also draw on other 'playful' influences and inventions. Whilst this might deem these artists less 'authentic' or 'orthodox' in the ongoing debates on the use of Chekhov technique (Daboo 2012) they are perhaps following the inherent inventiveness given in his form of embodied play, following their own Creative Individualities and making his technique their own as he advises artists to do. Chekhov's embodied play enables artists to explore the intangibles of performance ultimately experiencing and sharing them as something tangible with the world around them.

# **Chapter 4: Bing's Embodied Play, Cross-fertilization and Obscured (Her)stories**

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## **1. Introduction**

This chapter will consider the way in which Bing utilized a form of embodied play as an underlying principle in her approach to actor training which brought together not only the many different play-based methods that she directly taught the student actors at the VC, LC and CQ, but which also encompassed the techniques taught by others at the schools. The chapter will start by outlining the obscured (her)story of Bing's embodied practice; it will go on to consider the early collaborative exchanges with Copeau, Juvet and Dullin which fed into this form of embodied play. This will be followed by an analysis of her work with three other significant female practitioners: Naumburg, Dasté and Howarth and what these acts of cross-fertilisation brought to her practice. It will then provide a focus on three of Bing's overarching methods of play: working with objects; animal work; and rhythm. Crucially this analysis will consider the specific form of play-enabling that Bing developed, as this is inextricably linked with her use of play. Finally it will consider the relationship between gender, play and absence in conventional theatre and actor training (his)stories.

## **2. Bing: The Obscured (Her)story of the Embodiment of Play**

Bing's work on the development of a range of highly innovative embodied play methods within a larger pedagogic system of play in the early twentieth century was to prove seminal not only to her work with Copeau and their immediate collaborators but also to the VC schools and students. Crucially her work in this area also underpinned much of the later training and performance making of LC,

CQ and the subsequent work of practitioners in this genealogy of embodied play as will be discussed in Chapter 5. The way in which Bing developed these methods also epitomizes the complex, messy and impure nature of this genealogy and this chapter will demonstrate how the various and complex exchanges between practitioners operated rather than seeking to reduce these encounters to tidy, but problematic, representations of singular inviolable creative ownership, particularly in relation to gender.

As noted, traditional theatre (his)stories have either overlooked Bing's work, or continue to view it through a restrictive matrix, in a desire to locate (or to maintain) Copeau as the individual male 'originator' of this genealogy of play. Even when she is better acknowledged there appears to be a resistance to a more radical re-positioning by some scholars. Bing's contribution, for the most part, has been subsumed beneath the history of 'le Patron' and a chain of other male practitioners (e.g. Dullin, Jouvet, Jean Dasté, Dorcy, Saint-Denis, Lecoq) in what Clarke (2009) appropriately termed a Paternal actor training genealogy. A re-consideration of Bing must therefore also challenge the way in which certain actor training historiographies deal with issues of gender and argue against the use of problematic markers of 'success', significance and status in the theatre industry i.e. the direction of canonical theatre productions, commercial control of theatre companies and master-teacher narratives. This analysis addresses Bing's contribution to actor training and theatre making, but with an emphasis on process rather than end 'product'. It also considers how an artist can make a seminal contribution to theatre practice without being the person who holds the structural and economic power. Frost & Yarrow's recent claim that Bing should be described as the 'Mother' of Physical Theatre if Copeau is held to be the 'Father' (2007, p.27), despite succumbing to notions of 'ownership' in a rather purist sense, does attempt to give Bing equal significance to Copeau. This suggests that there is another (possibly Maternal in Clarke's terms) genealogy of actor training that needs to be analysed.

The aim of the chapter is to address the way in which Bing's work built on, borrowed from, and reacted against various exchanges and encounters. The shifting of Bing from the margins to the central focus in this discussion also reveals the similarly obscured (her)stories of other female collaborators. Therefore, the chapter will address Bing's acts of cross-fertilisation not only with male colleagues that she and Copeau worked with (Dullin, Jouvet, Dorcy, Jean Dasté and Saint-Denis), but importantly with three female collaborators Margaret Naumburg (1890-1983), Marie-Hélène Dasté (1902-1994) and Jessmin Howarth (1892-1984). Whilst a detailed discussion of these latter artists is beyond the scope of this project, Appendices VI-VIII provides an outline their practice and helps to re-position within this genealogy. As the work of Copeau's male collaborators is extensively documented elsewhere I will only briefly outline the contributions they made that were specific to the development of what I am defining as embodied play.

The scarcity of primary materials on Bing's work also applies to the work of Naumburg, Dasté and Howarth in relation to this area of play practice and will similarly require a more imaginative and suggestive use of secondary materials. It is also necessary to consider what Canning argues is a key aspect of a feminist legacy in relation to the construction of theatre histories, 'the important connection between public and private' (1993, p.530), not in an attempt to essentialise their experiences as women, but rather to acknowledge that their respective personal histories relate to both their creative work and the ways in which their histories have been excluded or marginalized. They were all bourgeois women working very early in the twentieth century and interestingly they were all working mothers who became working divorced mothers. Both Bing and Howarth also had children out of wedlock which situated them in a complex social position earlier in twentieth century. Whilst the less normative position all these women held may have been easier to manage in the artistic communities they worked within there is evidence



that it was a challenging role for Bing and Howarth to negotiate in personal, professional and economic terms. Rowbotham's argument (2011) outlined the in the preface would indicate that Bing and Howarth were altering 'everyday life' as well as their professional practices in this respect. No doubt their experiences as working mothers also created challenges, or at least significant changes, to 'family arrangements, ways of doing housework and mothering' (ibid, p.3). The accounts of the way in which the VC was later to work prior to leaving Paris, which are discussed in Chapter 5, would certainly seem to disadvantage the women who were both working and managing childcare.

A focus on Bing's interaction with three other women in relation to the development of a form of play also requires a consideration of the role of play-enabler and a return to Cattanach's (1992) discussion of the hegemonic view of play and play-enabling in relation to gender considered in Chapter 2 and the previous suggestion made in Chapter 3 that Chekhov's style may be interpreted as more 'Feminine' in this respect. Whilst Bing's personal style does not seem to have been as gentle as Chekhov's her practice clearly demonstrated this 'gentleness' in terms of the way in which her play-enabling gave a very specific space to the actors that she trained and worked with.

The specific contributions made by Copeau and Bing's early collaborators, and later students, were evidently significant to the development of this strand of embodied play methods but Bing's role was markedly different for a number of reasons. Whilst Dullin, Jouvett, Jean Dasté, Dorcy and Saint-Denis all contributed at specific points in time during the history of VC, LC and CQ (and the related schools), none of them, including Copeau himself, were involved throughout the entire process of development from 1913 when the VC was founded to the final phase of work by the CQ which disbanded in 1935. It was Bing who acted as the embodied through-line of practice in relation to the development of this strand of embodied play, albeit a through-line of curves and collaborative intersections rather

than a straight line of pure ownership and invention. It was she who not only tested out, experimented with/applied and connected the various strands of the companies' techniques into a coherent approach to actor training but also developed a principle of embodied play which was to run through training and theatre making. Dullin was dismissed by Copeau in 1919 and Jouvett was to leave in 1922 prior to some of the seminal work that Bing was to develop with the apprentice group in Paris and after the move to Burgundy in 1924. The apprentice group was made up of young actors aged 14-18 years, and Copeau believed that their training was of crucial importance to their overall project. In 1920 Bing's commitment to the VC school and the development of their training methods meant that she effectively stopped acting. However, despite being the major pedagogue at the time, and in all the years that followed, Copeau appointed Jules Romains as 'director' of the school in 1921 when the school expanded and became more formally established. Records indicate, and Dasté later commented that, Romains did not contribute in a significant way to the school and had little interest in actor training (Kusler 1979, p.33). Between 1920 and 1924 Bing was able to facilitate the development of their form of embodied play in different areas of her teaching of the young actors in what became known as the apprentice group.

As this chapter will demonstrate Bing's practice, like Chekhov's, did not simply utilize isolated games or forms of children's play at various points in the actor's training programme. Rather, she developed an entire pedagogic approach built on key features of play which underpinned, and brought together the work that she and the other teachers carried out in relation to many different technical and intellectual aspects of the training. What was seminal about this practice was the way in which she not only used play to encourage a higher level of free creativity in her students, but that she also taught highly complex technical skills within this broader and flexible principle of play, for example work with the noble mask and what is often termed the early stages of Modern Mime. Her expressive work with rhythm and movement blended with her use of transformational mimetic play with

animal-characters, object work, mask, character type and other areas. This work was firmly rooted in a specific form of imaginatively-embodied practice (and its related embodied knowledge) that was accessed and developed through play methods/principles that operate in a similar manner to Chekhov's overarching principle of 'Gesture' or Caillois' notion of play as 'total activity' (2001, p.175). Like Chekhov, she used play and games in different ways in order to teach specific skills and attitudes to actors, and to help them gain experiential knowledge of their own imaginatively expressive movement and the ability to observe and analyse the movement of other humans, animals and natural forms/elements. Her various methods were situated on different points on Caillois' (2001) continuum of structured play (*ludus*) to free play (*paidia*), and again we can see the movement between these poles within different methods. Like Chekhov, Bing also combined or layered different 'grounds' of play, or moved between them. For example Rudlin (2000) describes how she developed a simple 'Follow My Leader' game, by later masking the students (i.e. providing an additional set of rules for the game given by the mask). The students would then 'take the expressive focus in turn, with the rest of the masks responding sympathetically – though not necessarily reduplicating what the lead mask was doing' (p.60). This becomes a complex and 'extended' use of embodied play which leads the generation of small-scale performance which will be discussed further in Chapter 5. In Bing's practice there was not a rigid sequential system (although there was a clear line of development for the student) that taught one set selection of 'techniques' to the actor, but rather we see manifestations of her key principles in more dispersed and flexible points of emergence. They also changed and developed over time rather than being static. Concurrently, we can trace the emergence of a very specific form of play-enabling that was needed to train actors in this way; keeping a principle of play at the heart of their practice actually required the development of very specific pedagogic strategies. As discussed in Chapter 2, Bing had also enabled the students to develop a significant aspect of play in their everyday lives as part of the VC and later the LC school communities.

In this context we need to note that Copeau's practical involvement in the Paris school, in contradistinction to Bing, had been intermittent and despite his passionate belief in the importance of the training, and the central principle of play, he actually spent very little time teaching (Kusler 1979, p.90). This pattern was to continue after the move to Burgundy in 1924 in terms of Copeau's involvement with LC, and its related training programme and he never became a member of CQ, despite the integral connection. As Baldwin notes 'Although the vision initiating the Burgundy experiment had been Copeau's he proved himself an unreliable and ambivalent leader' (2010, p.82). However, whilst Baldwin argues that in this context it was 'Saint-Denis stepped [who] stepped in and filled the void' (ibid) this analysis demonstrates that it was Bing as the central actor-trainer and most experienced company member who was 'filling' this void in terms of sharing these methods of embodied play, despite not having a high status title of School or Company Director. Indeed it had been Bing who was the imaginatively-embodied intersection between all these experiments, phases and developments of embodied play (1913-1935). Bing was not simply applying the ideas and techniques of others in an obedient and unimaginative manner. Rather, it was she who developed these various creative and technical experiments in relation to her own performance, practical research, pedagogy and approach to direction. She literally embodied these experiments, from both within and without (i.e. as play-based actor, and as play-enabler), in time and space and in relation to fellow practitioners, students and spectators. She concurrently developed a technique of play-enabling that allowed for an integration and use of this play principle, which came to underpin the more radical theatre-making strands of this French genealogy.

Despite Copeau's complex, and at times, contradictory and inconsistent manner of discussing Bing's contribution, the description he gives of Bing's work as

a member of LC perhaps starts to touch on her significance. Her son, Bernard, quotes his father in 'Le Souvenir de Suzanne Bing' (1983):

That is le Patron [Copeau] of whom I will quote just a few of his words, taken from Souvenirs en registrés. It is about les Copiaux:

[Of] what elements was this troupe composed? First and foremost there was Suzanne Bing, the doyenne. She personified from the first day, more than anyone else and more than me myself, she personifies still and even to excess, the mystique of Vieux Colombier. It is she who transmitted to the young people the lessons of our art and the traditions of our craft.

(B. Bing 1983, p.17)

Whilst this is an important recognition of Bing's work, the subsequent discussion will demonstrate her capacity to create in her own right and not just her talent at 'transmitting' Copeau's vision and lessons.

### **3. Bing's Embodied Play and Transformations**

I am arguing that Bing's form of embodied play can be seen to contribute to the different areas of actor training that she developed. It includes the obvious use of improvisation, games (many of which are played by children), play and mime but it can also be seen in operation in other areas of her practice such as mask work and the use of rhythm and musicality. Bing was using these methods of play in areas of the school syllabus from 1920 that were not necessarily entitled 'Games' and 'Improvisation' as they had been categorized in the 1916 prospectus document, but was rather teaching this under different course headings in the list of classes and courses 1920 onwards. This included the initial class in Diction 1920-1921 and in the 1921-1922 programme under such course titles as Reading and Diction and Education of Dramatic Instinct. For example Dramatic Instinct directed by Copeau (although not often present) and Bing covered the: '[c]ultivation of spontaneity and invention in the adolescent. Stories, games of skill and wit, singing, dance, improvisation, impromptu dialogue, pantomime. The staging of

diverse means acquired by the student in the course of his general instruction' (Kusler 1979, p.29). Frost and Yarrow argue that what they define as Bing's 'physical theatre training exercises' were crucial to Copeau's project and contributed 'directly to the formation of 'les Copiaus' [...] and later, la Compagnie des Quinze under Michel Saint-Denis' (2007, p.27). However, I am arguing that this was not just the use of 'exercises' in Frost and Yarrow's terms, nor discrete areas of Bing's technique (i.e. what Donahue identifies as her use of mask and improvisation), that was her radical innovation, it was the way in which they operated within a broad and flexible approach of embodied play. Effectively play, for Bing, became what Gordon (2006) defines as Copeau's 'first principle' for training, performing and new forms of theatre-making. This can be seen in the way in which the 'Training of dramatic instinct' (1920-1921) also notes the '[a]pplication of different abilities acquired by student in the course of his general instruction' (ibid) and this is where Bing's application of a form of embodied play as an underlying principle is very significant. Close reading of the comments made by former students and the existing materials in English would indicate that Bing was binding the various strands of the syllabus, taught by various teachers (to varying degrees of success) together while continually developing them as part of a larger approach of embodied play.

In addition to the creative innovation of a form of embodied play Bing also developed the concomitant skills of enabling play in training and in terms of performance making and this is central to this analysis. This was also integral to the work she did to develop what I am terming extended play (discussed in Chapter 5) which enables actors to learn how to take these forms of play further into the realm of performance creation, i.e. it is the more involved 'application' of these forms of play. The legacy of the form of embodied play developed by Bing and her collaborators is therefore much broader (rather than just a use of 'games', 'exercises' or 'mime/mask techniques' in isolation) and has led to many exciting developments in embodied theatre in France during the twentieth and twenty-first

centuries and can be seen to have impacted heavily on what Murray and Keefe (2007) have identified as an international movement of Physical Theatres. Bing's investment in, and collaboration with, a younger generation of actors in terms of not only teaching them her form of embodied (and extended) play but also the way in which she actively nurtured their talents was also key. She directly influenced a series of practitioners who, in turn, went on to contribute greatly to the development of embodied play and this genealogy of theatre such as Dasté and Jean Dasté (and through them Lecoq), Dorcy, Decroux (and through him Barrault) and Saint-Denis. Re-considering Bing's form of embodied play consequently helps us add to the historical analysis of her work and offers us the chance to add to the current discourse around play, and *Le Jeu*, and suggests that we cannot adequately consider this area without also considering her contribution to play-enabling.

#### **4. Early Collaborations in Embodied Play**

From the start of his practical career Copeau had wanted to work in collaboration with other practitioners, as a family or troupe of artists, and yet he was to construct not only a hierarchical company formation, which clearly placed him at the pinnacle, but also a very particular and powerful role as 'le Patron' which was, at times, to the detriment of collaborative practice. There is a curious paradox at the heart of Copeau's writings and his actions in this respect. What complicates the matter is that his collaborators often support this image, or myth of Copeau, almost needing him to act as a charismatic 'Master Teacher' and visionary. However, in practice they were arguably also teaching Copeau and each other along with contributing to the development of the company's 'vision'. Bernard Bing discusses this complex issue in 1983: 'When I was a child my mother's words transmitted to me an image, at the same time desirable and unapproachable, of an infallible Patron, that is to say of a myth' (1983, p.17). Whilst the concept of a two-way learning exchange between teacher and student is clearly something that

Copeau admired in Jaques-Dalcroze's pedagogy, the way in which his writing and actions contributed to the construction of his own mythic role of le Patron is, at times, in contradistinction to this approach. This markedly hierarchical role meant that Copeau retained a type of ownership of 'the vision' as an individual rather than sharing the 'authorship' with his collaborators. A number of Copeau's key collaborators' feelings about their relationship with Copeau, and the way he defined his role and wielded this power, did not remain consistent over time and was arguably the main reason that Dullin and Jouvét were to leave the VC (Rudlin 1986, Kurtz 1999). Bernard Bing also notes the ambiguity of his mother's feelings about Copeau:

[It is my place as the son of Suzanne Bing] to honour my mother, to bear witness for her, it is certainly not to speak of Jacques Copeau like she spoke to me about him with a sort of cracked excitement, a mixture of idolatry and resentment; words with which one never knew if she was communicating life or death. And yet, she spoke well of him. I wish to say that if she spoke thus, the source of these words was not only her own folly but it was also her ambiguity towards him. Therefore it is to leave aside that ambiguity, leave aside this fragility – and from this place where I am – that it seems fair to me, it is a question of homage if you like, that the homage sees a person in her historical reality, not as a myth.

(1983, p.20)

This is helpful as it indicates a much more complex dynamic between his parents, and long term collaborators, rather than viewing them as overly simplistic mythic figures.

#### **4.1 Working with Jouvét and Dullin**

Copeau encountered problems transferring his intellectual and literary knowledge of theatre into imaginative-embodied practice at the start of his career and it is debatable whether he was ever fully able to enable embodied play. As Kusler (1979) notes, according to the reports in the company diary for the first season (1913-1914) it is evident that '[a]ctors like Charles Dullin and Louis Jouvét



encouraged a less analytical, more improvisational approach...[and it was] Roger Karl and Dullin [who] led the company most consistently in physical exercise and stage blocking' (1979, p.11). It was this collaboration with these younger practitioners which arguably enabled Copeau to start to find a more playful and body-based approach at this time. Indeed, Rudlin (1986) argues that, in contrast to this, it was during the stage of 'table analysis' of the play-text that Copeau 'had most to offer' (1986, p.31) in the theatre making process. This demonstrates why we need to resist overly simplistic master-disciple / director-actor knowledge and skill frameworks when attempting to analyse this genealogy of play practice.

At the time when Copeau recruited Dullin, Juvet and Bing he personally had no training or experience as an actor, or company manager, and had very little experience of directing. Two years before he had been involved in writing and staging an adaptation of *The Brothers Karamozov* (1910-11) in collaboration with Jean Croucé an actor at the Comédie Française (Kurtz 1999, p.8), at the Théâtre des Arts, in which Dullin and Juvet performed, but that was the extent to his imaginative-embodied experience of theatre-making. Rudlin argues that Dullin's experience and network of contacts meant that it was he who was 'instrumental in setting about raising the Vieux-Colombier company' (1986, p.9). When Bing joined the VC in 1913, she was already a practitioner and had undergone training at the Paris Conservatoire de Musique et de Déclamation (1905-1907) and was confident enough to firmly negotiate the terms of her contract, for example over the costs of costumes which according to Rudlin (1986) changed practices in the company as a whole. However, as Donahue explains: 'Bing's entry into the inner circle that formed around Copeau was due mostly to the influence of Dullin and Juvet. She was not a stranger to the theatre scene in Paris and knew both of them from at least 1907, when they would visit her in her fifth arrondissement room to rehearse their lines' (2008, p.106). Whilst Copeau did note that his lack of practical experience in the early years was relevant he did this in a rather inconsistent manner in line with his perception of his own role as the Patron.

Dullin, like Bing, also brought previous practical knowledge of theatre process with him to the company. Of particular interest is that early in Dullin's career, prior to joining the VC collaborators, he had not only performed for two years at the Odéon, and acted in various melodramas (i.e. non-naturalistic theatre), but that he had also frequently worked as a street performer. Kurtz describes how, for periods of time, Dullin had led a 'hand-to-mouth existence by reciting Verlaine in courtyards with a friend playing the violin' (1999, p.33) and, after working for the Odéon for two years, 'boredom drove him out into the open air again: he played in the provinces, [and] founded a Fair Theatre at Neuilly' (1999, pp.133-134). This interest in street performance and popular entertainment is interesting on a number of levels in relation to embodied play. Street performance requires an ability to work with a high level of spontaneity and flexibility to deal with the realities of an audience in general public spaces. Consequently it also involves a willingness to engage with sudden change and risk and the ability to spontaneously invent and change in tight timeframes. The encounter (and play) with the spectators is also central to these modes of playful performance. They also rely on a strong use of the embodied and visual aspects of performance. In this context it is not surprising that in the first year of the VC (1913) it was Dullin who had to challenge Copeau's lack of ability in pulling together the actor's intellectual and embodied processes when working on texts in Le Limon where the company lived, rehearsed and trained in 1913. As Rudlin argues:

[Dullin told Copeau] that it was not enough to read, to analyse and improvise and then leave it to the individual actor to achieve a synthesis of the verbal and physical, to find a means of embodying what had so far been an intellectual process. [Dullin demanded] the kind of directorial contribution to the interpretive process that Copeau did not yet have the vocabulary to give. Indeed, the early productions of the 1913/14 season were not to be particularly distinguished for either their direction or their acting. As to their style, Antoine, for one, found it too literary, too much like a dramatized reading – the very effect that Dullin had found it necessary to discuss in his letter.

(1986, p.13)

Of course, this could not be further removed from the later productions produced after the move to Burgundy that were based on the principle and processes of embodied play and took place outdoors. However, whilst at Le Limon in 1913 the company started to experiment with training and this included play-reading, sight-reading out of doors, vocal articulation, textual analysis, physical exercise (Copeau 1990, p.28) and they were undertaking improvisation, concerts, games and discussions in the evening (Kusler 1979, p.11). In addition to calling for a better way of working with actors, Dullin also made another crucial observation about Copeau's early approach:

[...] when you are acting yourself...[you] don't seem to want to bring life to your characters, but often continue with the same tone as in your readings. Is that what you want? Is it me that's wrong, or is it you that, in listening to actors, are allowing yourself to be seduced by the text, and in your mind are making up for the shortcomings of their interpretation – and therefore not drawing out a full performance.

(Dullin in Rudlin 1986, p.13)

The notion of being 'seduced by the text' is poignant in relation to Copeau's at times contradictory view of theatre-making when engaging with forms of play and his concurrent belief in the centrality, and in some ways the dominance, of the text/poet in the theatre-making process (see Copeau 1990, p.11). Whilst his collaborators also shared this belief in the significance of the text and playwright (at least in theory) the development of a form of embodied play started to present an embryonic challenge to one of their own early tenets about the centrality of the text, and provide alternatives, i.e. theatre making that uses extended forms of play. To some extent this was a contradiction or ambiguity that Copeau could never really reconcile.

Two of Jouvett's contributions were also pivotal to the early development of a more play-based approach; first was his commitment to the use of improvisation; and second was his scenographic design. Jouvett managed to both study as a pharmacy student and work as an actor on road tours before working with the VC.

Significantly in this context he performed the role of chorus leader in a provincial performance of *Oedipus Rex* in 1908 and had performed in various melodramas before working with Copeau. During the war Jouvet's correspondence with Copeau covered both the use of improvisation in actor training and the early ideas of his design of the trèteau Nu (a bare stage) for their New Comedy. A number of suggestions were highly innovative and many of his ideas were to be used and developed by the company. Crucial in the context of the development of play was Jouvet's suggested improvisational approach to texts. This is in sharp contrast to the descriptions of Copeau's table analysis but, as we will see, is clearly related to play based forms of analysis. Jouvet wrote to Copeau in 1916:

Don't you think that certain texts could be revitalized, regenerated by an exercise which would consist of reducing [the scenes] to outlines, résumés or skeletal actions: which the actor should first improvise, animate and clothe by himself. This would return the actor to himself vis-à-vis those texts full of prior influences, and maybe we could more easily renew the classics in this way?...If this work method does not seem useful or effective to you, maybe it would be good for the young ones, [who would be] raised far from the Théâtre -Française or the Odéon, far from textual analysis, maybe even from the text itself! [...] What do you think of this Rousseauesque idea of giving beginners only a copy, an altered and substantial text drawn from such and such a classic, then, later as a final initiation, give them the real text in all its splendour and perfection?

[From a letter written 31 January 1916, quoted in *Registres III*, p.p. 332-5]

(Jouvet in Rudlin 1986, p.226-227, emphasis in original)

Both Evans (2006, p.55) and Gordon (2006, p.138) rightly note the similarity between this approach and Stanislavsky's later development of the Method of Physical Action and Active Analysis but what is particularly relevant here is the way in which Jouvet's idea is reminiscent of the work of Chekhov which he was using long before Stanislavsky's later phase of practice. Indeed, Chekhov's use of play in relation to the initial exploration and practical analysis of a play text was to develop just a couple of years after Jouvet wrote this letter to Copeau. This emergence represents a curious historical co-incidence on the one hand, but

potentially represents a logical development of these methods of embodied play in relation to the exploration of text and the notion of working with 'outlines', 'skeletal actions', 'spines' (in Chekhov's terms), or essences in relation to text, scenes and/or characters. This was used in the forms of extended play that Bing and Chekhov were to develop that will be considered further in Chapter 5.

The second key contribution that Jouvét made in this respect was his Scenographic design and theatre architecture (see Rudlin 1986). In the context of this study his development of the *trèteau Nu* for the company's outdoor performances of their 'New Comedy' was important. In the same letter he discusses the idea of the *trèteau* and Rudlin's description of this is revealing in the context of how scenography can facilitate, and indeed create, forms of embodied play: 'The *trèteau*... removed any necessity for realism of setting, clearly stating the world which the characters inhabit is the world of farce...Secondly, like a children's game, it defines territory: whoever stands on it (Scapin for most of the time) is "King of the Castle"' (Rudlin 1986, pp.80-81). Consequently, the *trèteau* required a specific form of embodied play in the development of the New Comedy and the work of the two later companies.

## **4.2 Early experiments with Copeau at the Club de Gymnastique Rhythmique**

At the outbreak of World War I Dullin was called to the front and Jouvét became an assistant in the medical corps. The VC Theatre closed, but it was Bing who was to continue to collaborate with Copeau in practical terms. On Copeau's return from his trips abroad to meet with Craig and Jaques-Dalcroze, he and Bing were to establish their first play experiment with a group of children (aged 7-14) at the Club de Gymnastique Rhythmique which taught Jaques-Dalcroze's technique. Copeau explains that the breakdown of their 2 hours session include: Gymnastic technique; Solfeggio; Rhythmic gymnastics; Games (18/11/1915, JCA/KC/45) and that from the third session Bing is to lead the last part of the session on Games

(ibid). They worked with two instructors from the club and whilst Bing is referred to as Copeau's 'assistant' during this period, and Copeau certainly led this process, it was she who was the constant observer, teacher and documenter of this experiment. Copeau only attended on a fortnightly basis and did not even attend the first session with the children. However he was able to follow progress, and develop ideas, thanks to Bing's observations and writings.<sup>5</sup> This established the pattern, Bing as a consistent presence with Copeau's involvement being more intermittent, for their subsequent teaching experiments until the final independence of CQ. It is evident that Bing had the ability to lead these children in an exploration of play in a very different manner to Copeau. This can be seen in her style of teaching but also her ability to self-reflect on her work in a manner that demonstrated a rigor, self-understanding and honesty. From this first experiment Bing was developing both a form of evolving embodied play but also the concomitant skills of play-enabling which, I will argue, are integrally linked.

## **5. Bing's Playful Experiments and Acts of Cross-Fertilisation**

In 1916 Bing and Dasté visited Jaques-Dalcroze with Copeau in Switzerland and were able to observe his teaching. Whilst they were observing Jaques-Dalcroze technique in practice, of equal importance was the opportunity it gave Bing to observe his pedagogic approach in action. This included the teachers' enabling experiential learning and empowering the student-performers in their creative work. This was followed by the VC's move to New York (1917-1919) which was to prove pivotal to the development of Bing's form of embodied play.

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<sup>5</sup> Copeau comments '[t]hanks to Suzanne, I am going to be able to see myself working' (02/12/1915, JCA/KC/45) but it is important to note that through Bing's descriptions, observations and reflections he was also able to 'see' her work when he was not present.

## 5.1 Bing and Margaret Naumburg

During 1917 Copeau met Waldo Frank the writer and editor in New York. He also met Margaret Naumburg, Frank's wife, who in 1914 had established a progressive educational school initially called the Children's School, later called the Walden School at the request of the pupils. Naumburg at this time was using aspects of Maria Montessori's progressive pedagogic approach which she was trained in but was radically blending this with various other creative, play-based and movement influences, approaches and ideas, which were of interest to Copeau. In April 1918, when the company had moved to New York for their first season (and Bing had recently given birth to their son, Bernard), Copeau and Bing visited Naumburg's school together and were inspired by what they saw. Bing's report describes this encounter:

The Patron is truly astounded by the drawings, some of which are made of multicoloured and multifaceted cells of extraordinary power. Others represent theater characters and are for the most part light and pointed. A large panel of two sheets glued together is in front of the fireplace. It's a decoration that two children made to be used in a play they put on...The Patron leaves there refreshed...He sees he was on the right path.

(R6, 197 cited in Donahue 2008, p.117)

During the company's stay in New York Bing was to continue to be a key member of the VC company performing in a vast number of productions between 1917-1919 in a demanding schedule, often to considerable critical acclaim, but of equal importance was the time she was to spend with Naumburg at her school. It was at the Children's School that she was able to observe the use of creative games and play with the children as part of Naumburg's pedagogic approach, learn about the principles of Montessori and other radical pedagogic approaches, and was able to work with other play-enablers.

In recent years this encounter has been better acknowledged, but for most of the twentieth century, Naumburg's significance was hidden by the male history, along with that of Bing. In some earlier studies Bing's encounter with Naumburg, and its significance, is missing. In others the information is so scant as to be worthless, whilst on other occasions the information is confused or inaccurate which prohibits any more complex analysis of this exchange. Matters are further complicated in the literature by some scholars only using Naumburg's married title of Mrs. Frank when her work in various fields is referenced under her own name; whilst this was evidently the way in which VC company members referred to her in their documentation it becomes problematic when theatre historians follow this pattern. By 1996 Rudlin has more appropriately acknowledged the significance of Bing's work with Naumburg (who he then refers to by her own name) although this is not discussed in any depth. He also acknowledges that it was Bing 'who developed the practice of enhancing children's play on a professional rather than a domestic level' (Rudlin 1996, p18) and better discusses her actual practice in 2000. Donahue in 1998 and Evans in 2006 add to this scholarship by providing more accurate detail. As noted in Chapter 2, Frost and Yarrow in their 2007 revised edition helpfully start to discuss Naumburg's practice, training and interests providing much improved context. They also recognize the significance of this exchange of practice by citing Naumburg as one of the 'originators' in the use of play-based methods in drama teaching' (2007, pp.124-125). However, it is Donahue's later study (2008) which offers a revised, and perhaps the most useful, discussion of this moment of cross-fertilisation between these two women in North America that this analysis will attempt to build.

The rebellious, and avant-garde, mixture of training, skills and interests that Naumburg's practice drew on is particularly relevant to the development of this strand of embodied play by Bing. Naumburg (1890-1983) was born in New York City and studied for an arts degree at Barnard College, where Lascarides and



Hinitz note, 'she had been an enthusiastic student of Dewey' (2000, p.303).<sup>6</sup> After graduating in 1912 she enrolled at the London School of Economics and in the spring of 1913 she also undertook a training course with Maria Montessori leading to a diploma. Following this training Naumburg returned to New York and managed a Montessori nursery at the Henry Street Settlement between 1913 and 1914, which she did not find inspiring.<sup>7</sup> During the summer of 1914 Naumburg studied Organic Education with Marietta Johnson whose approach aimed to nurture the mind, body and spirit of the children in a free and self-determining environment.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, she also studied Jaques-Dalcroze's method of Eurhythmics during this period, which Bing and Copeau were to start to experimenting with the following year. In addition to this, Lascarides and Hinitz explain that Naumburg was also influenced by the work and practices of both F.M. Alexander and Freud:

Freud's detailed tracing of psychological development drew sharp attention to the child as an individual with his own inner life and needs. "Because this new psychology presented, for the first time, a fully dimensional picture of the child, it offered a framework within which a genuinely fresh approach to education could be devised – an approach that put education at the service of the child, and not the child at the service of education." Naumburg vowed to "open a school of her own in which the emotional side of education would have parity with the intellectual".

(2000, p.303)

Significantly, Frost & Yarrow explain that Naumburg had also been seminal in disseminating the ideas of both Dalcroze and Alexander in America in the early years of the twentieth century and was responsible for other acts of innovative

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<sup>6</sup> It is also worth noting that although Naumburg had Jewish parentage (as did Chekhov and Bing) she was to become part of the Ethical Culture Movement which was founded in 1876 by Felix Adler and was an intellectual and spiritual movement. The movement had three main strands; ethics, education and religion. She later became a disciple of Georges Ivanovich Gurdjieff for a period of time before becoming a follower of the medium Eileen Garrett (see Hinitz 2004) indicating an interest in various spiritual practices.

<sup>7</sup> In the context of the debate about notions of naïveté, it is relevant to note that both Naumburg and Montessori also worked with less privileged children. Montessori approach was initially designed to be used with children of working parents, children with special educational needs and from various cultures and social contexts. Naumburg had worked with children in the Project (social housing for immigrant communities) (cf. Frost & Yarrow, 2007 p.50)

<sup>8</sup> Marietta Johnson (1864-1938) founded The School of Organic Education in 1907, Fairhope, Alabama. The school did not require students to sit tests, children were not given grades and the curriculum included areas such as handcrafts and folk dance.

cross-fertilisation: '[s]he wrote an article popularizing Dalcroze's ideas in America, and (when the Great War put his business at risk) personally invited Alexander to New York, where she introduced him to her former teacher, the Pragmatist philosopher and progressive education advocate John Dewey' (2007, p.27).

Naumburg's exposure to Jaques-Dalcroze in terms of a participant centred embodied pedagogy based on rhythm, movement and expression along with Alexander's somatic practice engaging with the body, mind, emotion and spirit of the participant add a different dimension to the approaches of Dewey and Montessori, her earlier teachers. Naumburg's interest in the relationship between psychoanalytic ideas, somatic awareness and coordination is relevant in this context.<sup>9</sup> This impure blend of influences led to a radical approach to embodiment which connected physical experience and function with psychology and expression.<sup>10</sup> Essentially Naumburg's approach recognized the connection between the physical and psychological/emotional. This was a new approach in relation to avant garde pedagogy at the time in North America. From 1914 Naumburg undertook initially Jungian, and later Freudian, analysis which Hinitz notes was 'a very bold move for an educated woman of her time' (2004, p.462).

After a period working at a Montessori nursery which she apparently found 'dull and unimaginative' (2000, p.303 - Lascarides and Hinitz cite Cremin 1961) she had spent six months trying to develop an experiment in the kindergarten section of the New York City schools but left frustrated at the lack of equipment and what is reported as her unwillingness to conform to the pre-existent systems that had been established in the school. However between 1914 and 1916 Naumburg, with Clare Raphael, also established an 'adapted' Montessori class at Leete School where they taught an 'eclectic program, which utilized the variety of training that she had

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<sup>9</sup> Naumburg was also influenced by her sister, Florence Cane, the analytically orientated art teacher, who became the art teacher at the Walden School in 1920.

<sup>10</sup> Hinitz argues '[s]he found specific correlations between physical coordination and analytic psychology in their [Alexander, Bentley and Trotter] belief that the adult must find the deeper cause for a child's physical or mental problems and assist the child in the reeducation process' (2004, p.463).

completed' (Lascarides and Hinitz 2000, p.304) and this represented the start of Naumburg's blended approach which was to be utilized at the Children's School. Between 1914 and 1921 Naumburg founded and ran the Children's School which was one of the first nursery schools in the city, no doubt enabling women to undertake paid work.<sup>11</sup> It was the practice taking place at this school, drawing on this blend of influences, that Bing was to encounter.

At the time that Bing encountered Naumburg's practice the avant-garde pedagogue was clearly drawing on aspects of her Montessori training, along with ideas of Dewey and Johnson in that her approach centralized the freedom of the learner (and consequently gave a level of empowerment to the child), and experiential learning (learning by doing), drew on the notion of self-activity (and spontaneity) and crucially the philosophy of auto-education. The Montessorian belief that the children could become a type of self-directed community is also evident. Like Montessori, Naumburg's work also appears to have recognized the importance of joy or pleasure in learning, the significance of process over product, and the desire to create harmonious cooperation in the learning environment. All of this is similar to Chekhov (and Steiner's) approach to teaching. In Montessori's approach it is not a simple case of the teacher/director and the pupil/the directed, and this translated to Naumburg's essential philosophy. Perhaps most importantly Naumburg also adhered to Montessori's belief in the need for observation underpinned by the idea that the children are the teacher's learning materials. Lascarides & Hinitz point out that the form of observation represents a similarity with a psychoanalytic approach and describe it thus: '[The observer-participant] should allow situations to develop freely, abstaining from intervention when it is not necessary and acting appropriately when it is' (Lascarides & Hinitz 2000, p.160). Observation for Naumburg was clearly multi-dimensional in terms of physical, verbal, emotional behaviour and spiritual development.

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<sup>11</sup> In 1921 Naumburg became the Advisory Director of the school and in 1924 she ended her formal relationship with the school.

From existent materials it is hard to know to what extent Naumburg also drew on Montessori's concepts of moving from simple to complex tasks, from the concrete to the abstract, the isolation of sensory attributes, repetition and practice although it would seem that this is present in Naumburg's general approach. Interestingly, these principles are clearly visible in Bing's later work. The Montessorian interest in the close association between stimulus and response can certainly be seen in Naumburg's interest in using creative play and improvisation. However, whilst Montessori developed what can be called learning games and a range of learning materials (often referred to as didactic materials including the pink tower, brown step and red rods), and these certainly generate a certain type of embodied play-learning, her position on, and definition of, 'play' is markedly different to Naumburg and Bing. 'Montessori made great distinctions between work and play. She believed that play and make-believe are an escape from reality unsuitable to the child. She said that adult imagination created this play and the child is the passive recipient' (Lascarides & Hinitz 2000, p.153). They go on to claim that Montessori was also 'an adherent of the Anticipatory Theory of play developed by Groos. Only those forms of play that had an adaptive, preparatory function were acceptable. She translated the theory into a simpler formula, "play is the child's work"' (cited *ibid*). Naumburg's use of play and make-believe, and its expressive potential in the development of the individual child/group, is clearly in contradistinction to this position. The fantasy and fantastical (i.e. being things which don't exist, fairytale characters, witches, etc) is clearly not to be seen as a form of adult deception of children in her work but rather a healthy aspect of a child's expression. Naumburg was interested in exploring the individual child's self and was also interested in looking for expressive outlets for the unconscious and somatic awareness. She also believed that the child's instincts and fantasies should be expressed rather than suppressed through socialized concepts.

It was found that the capacity to learn was seriously diminished by a child's feelings of insecurity, shame, guilt, frustration, or fear...It was felt

that during the early years, the child's primitive drives and impulses should be understood and released, rather than merely suppressed or arbitrarily controlled. It was deemed more important for the child to express his own honest ideas and feelings than to provide the adults with the answers they expected or demanded.

(Lascarides and Hinitz 2000, p.305)

This is significant as it returns us to what the case study practitioners identified in certain forms of children's play, but it also reminds us that this freer dimension of children's play can also become repressed early on and that Naumburg's approach aimed to allow this level of openness.

A brief consideration of the work Naumburg went on to develop after leaving The Children's School is relevant here as it further articulates the early interests and fusion of influence and techniques she was developing when she worked with Bing.<sup>12</sup> By the 1930s Naumburg was working at the New York Psychiatric Institute using art expression as a way of diagnosing and also treating disturbed adults and children.<sup>13</sup> By the 1940s she had become a pioneer in art therapy in America, indeed Hinitz argues that her work at this time 'is considered by many to be the beginning of art therapy in the United States' (2004, p.463) and that her books and articles at this time described 'the use of spontaneous art expression as a means of diagnosis and therapy' (ibid, p.463).<sup>14</sup> Naumburg drew from both Jungian and Freudian analysis which Rubin notes 'was unusually eclectic for the period'. She was also open-minded about the meaning of visual symbols, choosing to rely on the artist's own associations' (Rubin 1999, p.99). These later developments can

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<sup>12</sup> Between 1924 and 1928, following her divorce from Frank, Naumburg and her partner Nathan Jean Toomer were disciples of George Ivanovich Gurdjieff. During this time they reportedly wrote manuscripts, attended 'dance' performances (probably displays of Gurdjieff's Movements and possibly the dervish demonstrations) and lectures led by Alfred R. Orage. This represents another curious historical coincidence in that Jessmin Howarth was to teach Gurdjieff's movements between 1924 and 1984 in both America and Europe.

<sup>13</sup> In 1928 she published her first book *The Child and the World: Dialogues in Modern Education* reflecting on her experiences at the Children's School and her involvement in the progressive educational movement.

<sup>14</sup> 'She espoused analytically orientated art therapy, a therapeutic approach emphasizing the projection of spontaneous images as a direct communication from the subconscious. It encouraged the use of spontaneous art productions as a nonverbal form of communication between pupil and art teacher or patient and art therapist' (Hinitz 2004, p.463). Rublin argues that: "Margaret Naumburg saw art as a form of "symbolic speech", coming from the unconscious like dreams, to be evoked in a spontaneous way and to be understood through free association, always respecting the artist's own interpretations. Art was thus conceived as a "royal road" to unconscious symbolic contents, a means of both diagnosis and therapy, requiring verbalization and insight as well as art expression' (1999, p.98). See Chekhov on the importance of hypnagogic states (2004).

be seen in embryonic form around the time that she met Bing and Copeau and there are arguably some correlations to forms of embodied creative play. It is likely that the experiential and self-determining aspects of Montessori's approach to education, along with Naumburg's own ideas about embodiment, rhythm, creativity and expression fed into her use of play. These features are similar to aspects of the embodied play methods developed by Bing and Copeau, and also Chekhov. Naumburg's interest in the relationship between psychoanalytic ideas and somatic awareness and coordination is also relevant in this context and this impure blend of influences led to radical approach to embodiment which connected physical experience and function with psychology and expression. Essentially Naumburg's approach recognized the connection between the physical and psychological/emotional, i.e. the same connection that the psychophysical approaches to acting that Chekhov, Bing and Copeau is based on. As noted, Rowbotham (2011) claims that women at the start of the twentieth century were altering everyday life and culture and 'criticised existing methods of education, delineated new areas of knowledge and subverted existing assumptions about culture' (p.3). In the case of Montessori, Naumburg and, as will be argued, Bing they did not simply criticize the existing methods of education but developed radically new forms of pedagogy and styles of teaching.

At the time Bing joined Naumburg at her school, the children were working in various ways that were significant to the development of embodied play. Following a visit to the school earlier in 1918, she was to work with Naumburg at her school between December 1918 and March 1919 and records indicate that she ran creative sessions with the children. Sadly, but perhaps not surprisingly, there are not many records of the details of these sessions and encounters available and even fewer have been translated into English. The school's practice involved the embodied development of the whole child and linked the physical/somatic to the psychological and emotional; and the expressive role of art in various forms was central. Related to this was Naumburg's decision to encourage various forms of

play as a means of enabling expressive/creative discovery and development in a manner not dissimilar to Steiner. In *The Child and The World* (1928) Naumburg talks about how she placed creative play, with its innate connection to mimicry and story-telling, at the heart of her practice. She explains 'that this marvelous power, which all children possess, to play and pretend, were for once taken seriously as to the groundwork of education' (1928, p.310). This provided a very different context for Bing to develop her use of embodied play, than the surreptitious arrangement that she and Copeau were forced to work with in Paris, as Donahue points out:

...here the children were specifically engaged in a program designed to awaken their innate skills and increase their imaginative abilities. No pretence was needed to engage the youngsters in the sort of activities that would be useful in the formation of a young actor. In fact, theater games were very much part of the daily programme and the children participated in them fully.

(Donahue citing R6, 2008, p.198)

This encounter was to prove seminal to Bing's development as a practitioner, and as Evans notes, it 'led to a fascination with improvisation, animal mimicry, games and the basic skills of what was later to become modern mime' (Evans, 2006, p.25).

This observation of children's creative exploration of mimicry and mimesis also related to their engagement with fantasy and how, as Donahue notes, 'fantasies are transformed in improvisational games that might be the basis of a valuable pedagogy' (2001, p.67). Bing was also watching an approach, facilitated by Naumburg's desire for the children not to feel the need to repress or judge their instinctive reactions, which encouraged spontaneous responses and expressions. As Copeau and Bing had noted this type of play demonstrated what they thought would be desirable to their theatre project. Copeau noted: '[C]hildren who play well, who *know how* to play, are models of verve, naturalness and invention. They are masters of improvisation' (Copeau 1990, p.155). He had also noted in their draft 1916 prospectus, under the heading of 'Games': 'From games, by means of

which children consciously or unconsciously imitate all human action and feelings, which are for them a natural path to artistic expression and for us a living repertoire of truly authentic responses' (Copeau cited in Rudlin 2000, p.74). Time spent with Naumburg, and her other experiments in America, unquestionably represent a pivotal stage of Bing's development of embodied play.

### **5.1.1 Bing and Naumburg: Somatic Awareness, Habit and Neutrality**

Whilst there are no direct primary materials available on Naumburg's use of Alexander technique with the children at the school it is a curious historical coincidence that her interest in his practice, combined with a belief in the need for somatic awareness, clearly underpinned her approach and that a few years later Bing and Copeau were to develop their work with the noble mask and neutrality. Naumburg argues against rigid habit, mechanization of movement and reaction and a lack of somatic self awareness. She claims that

...we're unconscious of our physical life. By that I mean the instinctive functioning of the life of the organism. Just the incessant mechanical reactions of these bodies of ours. They have all sorts of unique peculiarities of motion, gesture, tone of voice, and posture. But in our present abysmal self-ignorance, we can tell much more about the habits of any other person's body than our own.

(Naumburg 1928, p.312)

She goes on to articulate a perspective which closely resembles Bing's development of embodied play for actors:

We can't get away from this body that each of us has with him, and of which we know so little. To most people it would be useless to suggest what I am now telling you, that efforts to become more aware of our own gesture, movements, tone of voice, and general bodily habits, through a special training in pantomime and allied arts for the playing of roles, might lead us to a more profound self-knowledge and would therefore form a sound basis for the education of the future.

(Ibid, p.313)



This indicates a commitment to moving children away from mechanized and overly habitual behaviour married with her desire to construct spaces for children to express themselves without repression in, and through, the types of embodied play that she placed at the heart of the school.

The notion and practice of Neutrality was to become an important facet of Bing and Copeau's embodied play methods later in Paris and Burgundy. Copeau and Bing first used stockings or handkerchiefs to cover the actors' faces and were later to use what became known as the noble mask (see Rudlin 1986, 46). It was Bing who was to become the mask expert and developed a range of training exercises for the students in noble and character masks which engaged them in various forms of embodied play. The noble mask was used to develop an openness, availability and readiness in the actor that was not held back by personal habit. The very use of the noble mask and neutrality as a metaphoric tool acknowledges how socialized everyday behaviour can become for older children and adults, as Naumburg explains, we create a mask to confront the world and 'cut ourselves off from that whole self which we might have been' (Naumburg 1928, p.311). The intention of the work in noble mask is that actors are facilitated to open themselves out to these other possibilities that can be found through various forms of embodied play. Linked to this desire to escape the habitual restrictions of movement expressed by both Naumburg and Bing, was the ability to observe and analyse movement. Related to this was Naumburg's belief that children and adults are generally unconscious, or unaware, of their physical life and that there is a need for an increased somatic awareness; she clearly felt that the use of play could help achieve this. Naumburg points out that this requires an increased awareness of our own gestural, movement, vocal and general (Chekhov would also add mental and imaginative) bodily habits.

### 5.1.2 Another Forgotten Her-Story

Perhaps not surprisingly, Kurtz's (1950 French/1999 English) biography of Copeau talks of his relationship with Waldo Frank, but only briefly touches on Bing's encounter with Naumburg, and in such superficial terms as to be useless (p.70). Barbara Kusler's (1979) seminal study on the Vieux-Colombier school provides some, but sadly not enough, discussion of this exchange between Bing and Naumburg but she does acknowledge that this: 'helped to prepare her to utilize games and improvisation later at the Vieux-Colombier School' (1979, p.18). In her footnotes she explains that Bing worked 'with a friend, Mrs. Frank [Naumburg], in what was apparently a Montessori School' (1979, p.73). The use of Naumburg's married title and the confusion about the nursery being run with a pure Montessori pedagogy is then continued in Felner's later study. However, Felner notes that the opportunity that this gave Bing to observe children at play led to 'a better understanding of instinctive and natural movement. This experience served as an inspiration for acting exercises she later developed' (1985, p.39). She also acknowledges that this experience inspired Bing to develop 'what we call theater games today [...] They were designed to free the "child-like instincts for play," break down blocks, and release spontaneous movement' (ibid, p.42). She clearly identifies this as being significant to the development of what she terms Bing Technique and the development of Modern Mime. The absence of a more detailed consideration of this cross-fertilisation between the two women is regrettable in this context. Rudlin's early study (1986) continues this pattern. He describes this nexus point in the following minimal way:

In New York [Bing] had spent some time gaining practical experience teaching drama (as it is now called: the subject had no title and vocabulary in 1917) in a Montessori school founded by Waldo Frank's wife. There she used games, animal movement, mime and dance exercises as well as different techniques of dramatising stories. The work on animals stemmed from classes that she and Copeau had taken together in Paris in 1916 when they had first experimented with the idea of a Vieux-Colombier school.

(1986, pp.42-43)

In his (1990) publication of Copeau's text with Paul, Rudlin provides some slightly more detailed information and uses the name Naumburg. He points out that Bing 'used many of the exercises she had developed while working at a progressive infant school in New York, an interest which had been carried forward from the earlier experiment under Copeau in Paris' (1990, pp.36-37). Rudlin's (2000) study describes The Children's School slightly more accurately when he explains that it 'embraced the latest educational theories to do with freedom of choice and creative expression for children of primary school age' but simply says that 'There [Bing] used, in particular, games based on animal mimicry and later took the same classes in the Vieux Colombier School without making any adjustments for the greater age of the pupils' (2000, p.74). Interestingly even Rudlin's more recent discussion implies a one way form of exchange and this is highly debatable as it was evident that Copeau and Bing had found aspects of Naumburg's work useful to their project.

There also appears to be some confusion about what Naumburg's practices actually were prior to Copeau and Bing's involvement. Naumburg implies that Copeau had been able to name and discuss the aspects of her existing play work with children. In Donahue's article on Bing (1998) he briefly touches on this aspect of Bing's history and notes that she was also observing Naumburg and the children, not simply applying the experiments she had previously developed by Copeau:

Bing had observed the work of Mrs. Waldo Frank with small children at her Montessori school. Mimicry, especially of animal movements, seemed to catch the children at their most uninhibited. Later, during the summer at Morristown, New Jersey, Bing trained the children of the actors of the Vieux-Colombier to observe birds and to imitate their behaviour (Journal II 87). Then during the first year of the École du Vieux-Colombier visits to the zoo and the observation of animals were incorporated into her students' work and in 1921-22 into the course that she and Copeau team-taught.

(Donahue 2001, p.69)

Evans' study (2006) also addresses this encounter and provides a better description of Naumburg as a progressive educator and he acknowledges some of the different strands of her training and influences. He also briefly acknowledges that Naumburg 'believed in the liberating effects of play; in the value of intuitive, non-verbal and creative practice; and, in the ability of artistic expression to reveal and harness deep inner psychological forces' (p. 58). Evans recognizes that it was this experience in New York which 'led to [Bing's] fascination with improvisation, animal mimicry, games and the basic skills of what was later to become modern mime' (p.25). As noted, Frost & Yarrow's revised publication similarly acknowledges the importance of this encounter between the two women and notes that Bing 'observed and practiced Margaret's use of games' (2007, p.27); indicating a fruitful and more complex form of exchange than Rudlin's analysis implies.

### **5.1.3 Naumburg's Extended Play**

In addition to the experience Bing gained at the Walden School with regards not only to observing children's play and games, but also alternative styles of play-enabling by Naumburg and the other progressive pedagogies, she also watched ways in which this play was extended. For example, Naumburg provides a useful description of the way in which the children's animal play would evolve into the performance of the children's favourite animal folktales, indicating the way in which one form of play moved into another:

I hope some day you may see one of the younger groups playing at being animals. Sometimes the shy playfulness of a tumbling kitten, or the rhythmic thud of a lumbering elephant, or the flying leap of an escaping rabbit crosses the classroom floor. These fragmentary animal plays, crude though they be, soon grow into complete pantomimes of their favourite animal folk-tales. They spring to life in a wordless action, until all at once the necessity of further expression produces a grunt or a growl, or a triumphant phrase at the grand climax of a play.

(Naumburg 1928, p.302)

Fairytales, folk tales, myths and fables, in a manner not dissimilar to animal work, enable the children/actors to engage with fantastical, non-naturalistic, and often non-realistic, characters and beings. Bing and Copeau had used La Fontaine's fable in a similar way in their earlier experiments, and Bing was to develop and use various similar frames to extend the student-actors play at the Paris school which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

## **5.2 Bing and Marie-Hélène Dasté (Maiène)**

At this point it would seem vital to extend this genealogical approach to recognise the work of Dasté who was another crucial collaborator and can be seen as one of Bing's protégés. Marie-Hélène Dasté (1902-1994) was the eldest daughter of Copeau who grew up with the VC company, meaning that her personal history was completely intertwined with her development as a practitioner. She comments on her childhood experiences in the garden at Le Limon in the summer of 1913 thus: '...we could awaken to another day when the festivities would resume in the garden where everybody was playing – adults and children alike' (cited in Copeau 1990, p.245). Initially she undertook training in Jaques-Dalcroze's Eurhythmics and was later to become a pupil of the VC School (1920-1924). Donahue's helpful discussion of Bing's work with Dasté in America indicates a fertile stage of development when she was still very young. On the company's return to Paris, she acted minor roles and made costumes and attended the school as a pupil, and importantly, she was also to support the work of the school in other capacities. Her contribution as a company member of LC, and in relation to the development of their training, was also important on a number of levels.<sup>15</sup> With her

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<sup>15</sup> The second year prospectus for the Vieux-Colombier School, 1922-23 lists Copeau as both the General Director and the Director of Dramatic Studies. Suzanne Bing is listed simply as 'Administrator' (Rudlin and Paul 1990, p.42) despite her seminal role in the school and her development of the curriculum and Marie-Hélène Dasté listed as 'Secretary' (ibid, p.43). All the other directors (Literatures Studies, Musical Studies and Physical Culture) are men. However, Kusler notes 'The choice of Romain as a director was perhaps helpful in the development of literary courses for the public. But Romain had little understanding or interest in acting. The apprentice group, Division A, became increasingly a school unto itself, with Copeau, Mme Bing, and M-H Copeau provided the direction' (Kusler 1979, p.26). Copeau was in reality to spend very little time with the school therefore Bing and Dasté were largely responsible.

cousin Saint-Denis, Bing, and Jean Dasté (who she was to marry during this period) Dasté co-founded CQ. After the CQ disbanded in 1935 she worked as an actor and costume designer with the old VC collaborators Dullin and Jouvet, and also George Baty. After the war she worked in Jean Dasté's company, Comédie de St Etienne and following their separation she was one of the original members of the Renaud-Barrault Company working with Madeleine Renaud and Jean-Louis Barrault until she retired in 1982. Dasté moved to Copeau's house in Pernand-Vergelesses later in her life and founded the Association of Friends of Jacques Copeau.

Like Bing, Dasté cannot be traced or understood in relation to a canonical list of productions that she directed and therefore becomes effectively invisible in terms of actor training histories. Like Bing, she is also absent in Evan's (2006) chapter on Copeau's legacy and whilst she is included in the appendix of Rudlin and Paul's (1990) publication she is generally talked about in her role as Copeau's daughter, and the translated texts by Copeau comment on his perception of her rather than her actual contributions to the training and theatre-making practices. The dovetailing of Bing's encounter with Dasté is highly relevant but has not been considered in detail. The way in which Copeau wrote to Jean Schlumberger, years earlier on 2 August 1919 is revealing in this context:

Vocation signifies something very great and very difficult...We must constantly aspire to grandeur and be self-sacrificing. And I know that a generation can be raised in this religion, because my daughter is already completely devoted to it. She is able to do whatever I ask of her, and quite often I listen to what she is saying as a warning. Her judgments of my work go to the very heart of my inspiration. Sometimes, it happens that I say things which she alone understands. Ties of blood and mind, a multiplication of forces. Creation through love. These are not vain words...

(Copeau 1990, pp.246-247)

However, Decroux argued that her contribution, and her personality, was crucial to the success of the school:

The latter, known today by the name of Marie-Hélène Dasté , was a young girl whom we addressed as “tu”, and who we called Maiene [...] Joining in our pranks with a knowing smile, she was nevertheless the chain that bound us to discipline, but in the form of a flexible and blossoming liana. In Copeau’s authority there was theocracy, in Suzanne Bing’s there was asceticism. This could have made our lives morose. Thank to Maine, who inherited three-quarters of her smile from her mother, this was not the case at all! What a happy trinity! [...] We had some good times in Burgundy and I think the failure could have been avoided. But there came a time when [...] the difficulties of communal life won out

(Decroux 1977, pp.2-3)

Bing and Dasté were together responsible for a number of the VC’s earliest experiments with masks and mask-making which took place during the same period of the former’s cross fertilization with Naumburg. Although we know little about this early work these experiments with mask-making (and associated types) were carried out by around the time when Bing was directly experimenting with embodied play involving animal work, fairytale and character types and the company at Naumburg’s school would certainly seem highly relevant to the development of embodied play. Dasté and Bing’s interest in the visual image, along with the mask, correlates to the development of embodied play and this appears to parallel certain aspects of Chekhov’s use of visual image, visualization and the caricatures that he drew of characters, and also actors. It would seem that the actor’s ability to ‘see’ whether in the imagination (i.e. Chekhov’s Imaginary Body) or in reality as a one dimensional form (an image) or three dimensional object (mask, and other objects), facilitated by a process of embodied play, is significant. The actors involved in embodied play allow themselves to be led by this real or imagined image/object. This visual sense also seems to help the actor discover the character’s essence/spine/gesture. In addition to this, Leabhart also discusses the significance of the tactile ‘feel’ of making masks, i.e. the practitioners using their fingers in clay, and other materials, which was later reported on by Jacques Prénat on his visit to the school in Burgundy as an important form of

learning in mask practice (Leabhart 2004, p. 322). The practice of mask making was to continue in the schools in Paris and Burgundy and mask work was also central to the work of LC and CQ.

The relationship between animal play, embodied character type and the notion of finding an essence of a character, which features in Naumburg, Bing and Dasté's practice, certainly appears to link to the development of the later work of Bing, Dasté, Copeau and their other collaborators. Rudlin (1986) argues that the animal work also helped Copeau to develop Commedia dell'arte character types in 1918: 'he came [...] upon one of the essential keys to building a c ommedia character. P antalone, the Magnifo, has, for example, to be modelled on the movements of a chicken if the key to the mask is to be found. But Copeau had not yet even begun to explore the possibilities of half-mask' ( p.101). Whilst Rudlin explains that at this time Copeau had not even begun to explore the possibilities of half-mask, Donahue's analysis (2001) points out that it was whilst the VC were in the USA (1917-1919) that Bing and Dasté started their work with masks (although not half mask), meaning that this current of practical exploration was already present, and it would seem fair to argue, feeding directly into the development of embodied play by Bing at that time (Registres, IV 303). Donahue notes: 'Copeau had some intuitive ideas about the use of the mask, based on his experience with masks in his production of *Les Fourberies de Scapin*. Teaching young people how to use it posed other problems. Bing, however, seems to have had the more practical sense' (p.69). He also points out that when the VC school opened in Paris 'training with the mask became an essential part of the students' class work. Bing wanted to force these novice actors to break with any attempt at realism, to make them act with their whole body rather than their face alone' (ibid). The company's later work with character and noble Mask in Paris, which I am arguing is an extension of Bing's development of embodied play, is fairly well documented although predictably Bing and Dasté's contributions often remain hidden under general descriptions of the practice and Copeau's written reflections. However,



there are a number of key elements of this work that are bound to the development of embodied play that need addressing, along with the way in which Dasté directly contributed to the continuation and development of this practice in French theatre and this will be returned to later in the chapter.

### **5.2.1 Female Archivists and Publishing Catalysts**

Dasté moved to Copeau's house in Pernand-Vergelesses later in her life and founded the Association of Friends of Jacques Copeau. With her cousin Suzanne Maistre (Michel Saint-Denis' sister), Dasté was also responsible for the management of the Copeau archives and, with Paul Norman, the publication of a number of his, and the company's, writings/notebooks. Significantly, this mirrors the support that Chekhov had from his female collaborators in terms of developing publications, documenting processes and archiving materials (the work of Boner, Straight and du Prey and later Powers). Howarth was also to play a similar role later in her life, as will be discussed.

## **5.3 Bing and Jessmin Howarth**

As discussed in Chapter 2, Copeau and Bing were influenced by the progressive pedagogy of Jacques-Dalcroze and had already experimented with his technique when they worked with the teachers Paulet Thevenaz and Lili de Lanux in Paris and with the children's group (1915-1916). After the war Jessmin Howarth (1892-1984) was invited to work with the VC as a movement teacher due to her training in Jacques-Dalcroze technique and was to join the company for two seasons during their time in New York. The work that Howarth carried out encompassed a number of areas significant to the development of Bing's embodied play method, although not always in obvious and direct ways. Consequently, her involvement intersects with these other acts of cross-fertilisation

that took place in America between Bing and the other female collaborators: Naumburg in New York; and Dasté in Morristown. Significantly in the context of this genealogy, Howarth's involvement in the company is generally reported to have been an experiment which 'failed', in part related to Copeau and Bing's ultimate decision not to continue working with Jaques-Dalcroze technique despite later appointing Jane Erb (1921) as a second attempt to work with a teacher of this method in relation to their actor training methods. Copeau notes in his letter to Jaques-Dalcroze in 1921: 'I took Jessmin Howarth to America. It was fruitless and I had to dismiss her. This year, in Paris, I tried out Jane Erb, who had approached me burning with desire to be one of us. The same profound disappointment. I dismissed her at the end of the season' (Copeau 1990, p. 63).

Howarth trained the company in rhythmic gymnastics and also attended rehearsals. Crucially she was using a student-centred pedagogy (like Naumburg) and was also exploring rhythm and movement in more general terms. Curiously Evans also evaluates this encounter as an experiment that 'did not work' despite later explaining very clearly what Bing was to gain from watching Howarth during this period and was able to use in her own practice at the school in Paris (1920-1924): 'Bing had taken notes on Howarth's movement classes, focusing on aspects of interest to her (silent pantomime, sensory experience, the essential rhythms of character) which she was now able to integrate into her own teaching' (2006, p.26). However, Evans notes that 'Despite such problems, Copeau and Jaques-Dalcroze shared a life-long admiration for each other's work, each recognising in the other a fascination with the interaction of rhythm and movement in the work of the actor and performer' (Evans 2006, p.18). What is interesting here is that the focus is on the two men and their admiration of each other's work. In practical terms the encounter appears to have operated through the embodied engagement of the women and what warrants analysis here is what this encounter offered Bing in relation to the development of an embodied play method, and the related skill of play-enabling despite this notion of failure and rejection in a purist sense. This

starts to suggest that we also need to deconstruct what we understand or classify as success or failure in terms of theatre histories.

Copeau's analysis of the problems they encountered in using the technique is interesting in terms of its very personal evaluation of the practitioners mixed in with his concerns about the technique itself. It is also significant that the two Dalcroze pupils that worked with the company were women and how he describes their personal attributes and their sexuality:

All the pupils of rhythemics I have known have seemed to me to be inhuman, or rather dehumanised. I mean that that they no longer seemed to have the same faculties as ordinary mortals, nor the natural, instructive contact with ordinary, present-day life....one finds them highly-strung, thin-skinned, anxious, almost unhinged, often frivolous and almost always tormented by the more or less self-conscious effects of sexual inhibition. They all, equally, lacked the power of being unaware of themselves, of forgetting themselves, of surrendering themselves, in short of giving themselves. They lacked the gift of living with others, of inspiring confidence and friendship, of making themselves both respected and loved. Lacking this natural authority, the one they lent to their functions became annoying, scoffing and offensive.

Was I just unlucky? Or are these traits that I mention generalised ones? I ask you as you are the only one who can enlighten me.

(Copeau 1990, p.64)

He goes on to reflect that this technique has not really been integrated fully in their form of dramatic education '[i]t has never been *incorporated* or *internalised*. Up to now, it has not animated the new teaching and has not had even modest effects or results. It is a *pretentiousness* added on to so many others, nothing real or effective' (ibid, pp. 64-65).

A brief consideration of what Howarth went on to do after being dismissed (or not re-contracted, the accounts vary) by Copeau when the company returned to Paris is worth noting to provide a context of her work in movement, dance and embodied practice. Following her time with the VC she was to work for three years

as an Assistant Choreographer at the Paris Opera before encountering Gurdijeff's Movements, which she was to subsequently to teach across America and Europe between 1924 and 1984. Howarth was also to train in Mensedniek System after giving birth to her daughter by Gurdijeff and was to teach Dalcroze technique, Movements and was to run a dance studio in Hollywood in the late twenties. Like Bing, Howarth's effective history was intertwined with her work as an embodied practitioner as she was also to have a child with her close collaborator out of wedlock, and like both Bing and Dasté was to continue to work as an unmarried woman supporting her child. Significantly, Howarth's comments on the Movements relate to an interest in similar areas to Naumburg and Bing in relation to somatic awareness and the need to escape rigid habitual movement patterns:

We realise in the movements that we are rarely awake to our own life – inner and outer. We see that we always react in a habitual and conditioned way; we become aware that our three main centres, head, body, feeling, rarely work together or in harmony. We begin to try to move always intentionally – not mechanically – and we discover in ourselves many hitherto unexpected possibilities. We find that one can collect one's attention; that one can be awake at times and have an overall sensation of oneself; that a quietness of mind, an awareness of body and an interest can be brought together and that this results in a more complete state of attentiveness in which the life force is felt and one is sensitive to higher influences. Thus, one has a taste of how life can be lived differently.

(Jessmin Howarth / accessed 24/06/2010)

It is also a curious historical coincidence that during the twenties that Naumburg was also to become a follower of Gurdijeff and reportedly watched various related performances. Later in life Howarth was also to take on a similar role to Dasté, du Prey and Boner, in terms of her involvement with the establishment and management of the Gurdijeff archives, despite her ambivalence about him as a person.

#### 5.4 Play in the Paris School; Training and Making (1920-1924)

After the two year period spent in the United States of America the VC returned to Paris and in February 1920 the theatre re-opens with Bing and Copeau's translation / adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. In the same month the VC school opens. At the Paris school Bing continues to develop her form of play in relation to her own teaching and direction, but also in relation to the development of the overall syllabus of the school and various styles of teaching and play-enabling. Her form of embodied play enables the company to connect, and transform, the different areas of training together in a coherent manner. Her work with many of the key forms of play (animals, objects, rhythmic play, mask, character type and known narrative) continues and develops during this time. Importantly she, and her collaborators, also developed ways of extending this use of play in ways in this training, ultimately empowering the student-actors to create performance. Bing directed them, and supervised/mentored their own student-led projects, which extend play through the use of such devices as simple and known narrative frames including fairytales and character types and masked performance. She also directed them in *Kantan*, a Japanese Noh play, just prior to Copeau disbanding the VC in Paris 1924. This use of extended play will be considered in detail in Chapter 5.

Although two of the early play collaborators, Dullin and Jouvet, had left the company by 1922 Bing still had Dasté working closely with her and they were to be joined by a group of gifted actors/students who were all to help further develop this strand of embodied play including; Jean Dorcy (1895-1978), Jean Dasté (1904-1994), and Etienne Decroux (1898-1991) who was in the amateur group in Paris but joined the core company after the move to Burgundy. Dorcy contributed by helping to take over teaching (and arguably modifying through its use with embodied play) Hébert's system of natural gymnastics from Georges Hébert, and subsequently his assistant M. Moyne. He adapted Hébertism for the needs of the

actors, and these forms of embodied play, and significantly he also taught this in conjunction with circus skills and acrobatics that he learnt from the Fratellini Brothers (who were also known as the 'inheritors of the commedia dell'arte') to the other students (Kusler 1979, p.30).<sup>16</sup> It was later Jean Dasté, who joined the apprentice group as a student in 1922-23, who took over the role of student-monitor in relation to this use of Hébertism. This is particularly significant in relation to the later lineage of practice as he and Dasté were to later work with/teach Lecoq, who was therefore exposed to the blend of Hébert's method and mask work synthesized in Bing's form of embodied play. There were challenges and changes in the school 1920 – 1924 and in the later years there were budget cuts, records indicate that it was Bing and Dasté who were responsible for practically re-designing the school teaching programme and that Bing spent considerable time integrating and relating the different aspects of the training, making it a 'whole' in Chekhov's terms, rather than disparate techniques that did not speak to each other. It would appear that even her teaching that explored very technical training maintained this link with embodied play. In the 1923/1924 programme there was a course on Stage Instruction but there are few records on what this covered. Kusler's research has discovered that Bing, Dasté and Jean Dorcy all helped Copeau to teach this class and that they were to follow a basic outline which prepares the students for creative work and then explores developing improvisation, ensemble work and interestingly 'adherence to basic structure through games, charades, and stories as well as improvisation' (ibid, p.42).

## **5.5 Play in Burgundy**

In 1924 Copeau disbanded the company and with Bing and a number of their actors, students and his family, moved to Burgundy in order to continue

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<sup>16</sup> 'For Copeau, Hébert's system facilitated the goal of "the natural development of the instinct for play," through the building of physical prowess and the regaining of instinctive behaviour – two vital tools for the Copeau actor' (Felner 1985, p.41). Lecoq describes how Hébert's 'natural' method of gymnastics 'analyses movement under eleven categories: pulling, pushing, climbing, walking, running, jumping, lifting, carrying, attacking, defending, swimming. These actions lay down circuits in the human body, through which emotions flow' (2000, p.71).

training the actors and in the hope of carrying out practical research to create what they had defined as the New Improvised Comedy. Copeau's decision to close the Paris theatre and to move to Burgundy has been interpreted and represented in different ways in various historical studies and it is hard to glean Bing's position on this phase of their project as there are no records in English relating to this. However, regardless of Copeau's motivation for the move to Burgundy it certainly allowed the company to start to draw more explicitly on the forms of extended embodied play that Bing, Copeau and their collaborators had been developing for a number of years and use it in performance both inside and outside the school/training environment. In Burgundy they were to rehearse outdoors as they had at Limon, focus on making performance drawing on extended forms of play and were to start to perform outdoors to a very different type of audience in barns, dance-halls and village/village squares enabling them to explore a much freer and more explicit play with the audience members. After the move to Burgundy Bing was once again responsible for the training and carried with her many of the play enabling techniques and approaches she had developed in the previous years. As before, Copeau did not offer a consistent commitment to the training or theatre making projects undertaken by the collaborators. As Kurtz (1999) explains, for '[m]ost of the first two years in Burgundy, *le patron* did not give the school the full leadership it looked for and had a right to expect' (p.123). He goes on argue that 'His state of fatigue and moral depression could explain this in part, but the truer explanation must have been his own change of heart and mind. In leaving Paris, he was for a time leaving a world that he could not understand, and therefore rejected. This was the change that has been generally called Copeau's religious conversation' (1999 p.123). Effectively Bing was left running the school, and provided the energy and spirit to keep the company together. When the initial experiment only lasted five months, a number of the artists decided to stay on and from 1 March 1925 a new organisation was formed which became known as LC. Saint-Denis took over as director but once again Bing was to lead all the training in their newly configured school and the later company was to draw directly on the

forms of extended play they had been experimenting with in a training context. In addition to this she was also to return to acting, and to working as a co-creator / co-deviser, in their theatre making processes. Crucially the spirit and practice of this embodied play starts to enter the realm of professional performance after the 1924 departure from Paris. After a period of time, Copeau was to reclaim the directorship from Saint-Denis, and as Rudlin notes, in his later work as their director, Copeau 'he moved further and further away from his early insistence on the supremacy of the theatrical values of the text, towards a theory of action as the paramount dramatic statement' (1986, p.93). After Copeau disbanded LC Saint-Denis founded CQ (1930-1935) with Bing and a number of the other former students and company members and they continued to draw on and develop these forms of extended play.

The contribution of Saint-Denis as a student-actor/director came much later in the history of the company. Rudlin wisely suggests that we read Saint-Denis' narratives about his involvement with the three companies and related schools with caution as he 'exaggerates his collaboration in the work of the school: ...[he]..was no more than an interested observer of the Vieux Colombier School' (1986, p.132). In fact Saint-Denis' involvement between 1920 and 1924 had been as general secretary of the company and he had carried out administrative and stage management duties, although he played one supporting role in *Twelfth Night* in 1922. It was only when the company moved to Burgundy in 1924 that he became full member of the school-company for four years. He subsequently became co-founder and Director of CQ, where, in collaboration with Bing, Dasté, Jean Dasté, and Dorcy, he drew on and developed these forms of embodied, and extended, play in relation to training, processes of theatre-making and popular and community based performance.



## 6. Objects and Play

There were various discoveries made during the early experiments in 1915 at the Club de Gymnastique Rhythmique that were to be central to the development of embodied play by Bing and her collaborators. In addition to Bing's reflections on, and development of, the use of play/games and ways of enabling play, her observations of, and subsequent work with, objects, animals, and rhythmic play were important and provide useful exemplars. Bing was to use variations of these games with actors (both the younger and older actors) at the three companies with reportedly little alteration. Whilst Evans has noted that some of the resultant improvisation games have become common in theatre teaching and that participants can be complacent and need to work at removing clichés they associate with them (2006, p.129), it is necessary to consider how they are actually working as games and why they work well enough to have become so widely used. In addition we need to consider how they work in relation to the wider principle of embodied play and how they prepare actors to learn and use the principle of play in a wider sense. Bing's observations of the third session she attended on 25 November 1915 notes the children's use of objects:

...the big girls quietly jump rope. The three youngest girls do not group together, but each one takes a rope, dragging it behind her, laughing; they seem to adore this game (I remember how excited I use to be, with lots of imagination; something like a snake), the object comes to life, seems to gallop around by itself, so that it ends up by chasing after you; a burst of excitement. (Use this game for the big girls also, have them improvise in their own way making the rope slither, jump, or glide jerkily, like a puppy, a lizard, etc. – and play music according to what they will do?)

(JCA/KC/45, emphasis in the original)

The players in this game are obviously using embodied imagination to transform the rope into a living thing, which Bing suggests could be a snake. This involves the player animating the object to give "it" a seemingly independent life. The object restricts the embodied-imaginative focus, and limits the possible physical reactions

(i.e. they have to remain connected to the object) thereby increasing the players' creativity and keeping them firmly in the moment. The external object 'creates' the rules for the embodied play, in a manner similar to Chekhov's Imaginary Body and Centre. At the same time, the physical act of animating the object involves a form of play with different movement qualities and patterns in space, and a specific exploration of identity, i.e. the snake slithering. The rope is, of course, attached to the player's body which requires them to do (different) less everyday movements in order to produce the required movement quality in the animated object. Consequently, this form of play is broadening the imaginative embodied range of movements and possible movement qualities in relation to both the animated object and the play of animation.

The initial focus in this game is on the object, the snake, i.e. not the player's personal self, psychology or movement patterns. As Bing notes, the game involves investing the snake with an external life so that it can then 'gallop around by itself so that it ends up chasing after you'. So the player creates this snake from the object and their relation to it, but at a certain point they can then, in turn, play with this creation. In this game the player can be chased by "it", therefore creating a specific dramatic dynamic and a related Atmosphere in Chekhov's terms. This actually represents a complex use of ego and focus, although the game is very simple. It requires the player to be both within and connected to the game, and responding to the situation, but they must also be able to invest a level of ego and focus in the snake to give it life. In other words it is an embodied imaginative interplay between subjective-objective and internal-external (divided or dual consciousness) dynamics. The object helps to create both the connection and also the distance, like a mask or the visualized form of the Imaginary Centre. In addition Bing is considering the potential of animals in play (puppy, lizard) and also the use of music in response to the improvisation that evolves bringing an aural dimension to the form of play and adding to use of atmosphere.

By the seventh session (23/12/1915) Bing has started to experiment further with embodied play in relation to the imaginative transformation of objects:

I took a big stage-prop paint-brush in order to create an umbrella, a parasol, a paint-brush, or an orchestra conductor's baton, and they made a hammer of it (criticized by the others, the nail to be hammered in, etc.), a brush (the distance between the piece of wood and what is being brushed, by the thickness of the bristles), a broom (in the bad direction, the head of the broom would come to be raised to a horizontal position, a bow, a cane... 'La Tour prends garde'. I was rather poor in inventions.

(JCA/KC/45)

This game works in a very similar manner to the animated object-animal, in that again the object and its imaginative transformation provides the rules of the game itself, however in this case it is exploring a human relationship, and related action/activity, with an object. This develops the players' range of actions and gestures in relation to the material object, but also often involves mime. The relationship to space, and also movement quality (i.e. brushing in contrast to using a baton) are also used. There is also an element of repetition in terms of finding multiple spontaneous transformations in the given timeframe of the game (i.e. the player is required to work quickly and intuitively rather than analytically). It also develops the players capacity to look, and engage with, objects differently and to 'see' the potential for play in objects.

It is possible that the objects used in relation to the players' body in this imaginary context can operate as a type of hypnotic toy when rhythmic movement becomes established as defined by Newson and Newson (1979) and discussed by Wilson et al in their work on Play Therapy: 'because the whole body is caught up in rhythmic action with the toy... it seems to project the child into a different level of awareness' (Wilson et al, 1992, p.55). They further explain that '[t]he child's play with "hypnotic" toys is somewhat similar to certain adult hypnotic states...[which] puts the person into a relaxed state in which a different attitude about events and experiences is made possible' (Wilson et al, 1992, p.55). This work with objects

requires whole body expression, and/or specific actions, related movement qualities, rhythm and energy use that is determined by the movements in relation to an object with a distinct/imagined form. This type of embodied play with an object (like playing with a visualized object such as the Imaginary Centre) can also take the adult actor into a different state of embodied-awareness (what I have defined as embodied play consciousness), at times also involving the experience of Flow, and in which a different attitude about objects, actions, events and experiences are possible. Wilson et al also explains that when older children play with hypnotic toys in this way it is not a case of simply regressing, instead they suggest a type of dual consciousness in embodied play. 'It is more, then, than the child simply regressing to a less mature level of functioning. The child by playing with younger toys, is able to re-experience creatively an earlier level of development, at the same time still being aware of his present developmental level' (1992, p.55).

Whilst not suggesting that hypnotic toys work in the exactly the same way for adult actors as they do in children, what is interesting is this suggestion that children are able to re-connect with an earlier type of 'development' (or perhaps a different form of creative engagement in play) whilst still being aware of their present developmental level. This might also be a type of dual, embodied play consciousness, shared by adult actors playing with certain types of hypnotic toys, and with embodied play methods in general and may be one of the ways adult actors access some of the experiences related to metaphoric naiveté.<sup>17</sup> It is significant that objects, particularly masks, were to become of central importance as transformational toys in Bing's form embodied play and the work of the three companies and schools. Rudlin's (1986) discussion of the 'expressive need' of Jouvett's umbrella in the VC production of Molière's *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (1917) is interesting in this context as it demonstrates how significant objects would become not only in training but also in public performance. Rudlin goes on to note

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<sup>17</sup> Note Chekhov's stick, ball, and veil exercises in this respect (see Felicity Mason 1993).

how 'Copeau, in a later lecture remarked that this accessory, an umbrella, was "admitted by the text", that is to say that, once found, it justified itself in terms of the text, not merely as a prop to the actor's embodiment of the character' (ibid, p. 77). However, the playful possibility of the object is apparent in Rudlin's description and the way in which Jouvét transformed it into weapons is similar to the exercise that Bing outlined in 1915:

Jouvét played G ronte to Copeau's Scapin. In rehearsal, he first found the silhouette of an old man (he was himself only thirty in 1917) and then began to feel the need of an accessory through which G ronte could express himself [...] G ronte opened it and closed it [...] He scratched or tapped the ground with it, he trailed it behind him [...] he twisted it in his hand, and then used it as a weapon, as a bayonet, and so on. Going in to the famous scene of the sack [...] he was thus armed with it as a kind of counter to Scapin's sack.

(1986, p.77)

The type of embodied play that Bing was observing and creating in the early experiment in 1915 gives actors an awareness of the playful potential of objects, furniture, architectural forms, natural forms (plants, trees, mountains) and how they might be able to use them. This recalls the discussion about Chekhov's Fantastic Psychological Gesture and the way in which he suggested that actors could 'toy' with the space, natural forms and objects (1984, p.81). The work of both LC and CQ were to draw heavily on this work with objects, which will be considered in Chapter 5. The use of objects, and body-as object, in addition to actual masks, has been something that has been used in the French genealogy of embodied play throughout the twentieth and has continued in the twenty-first century. Jean-Louis Barrault, Mummenschanz, David Glass Ensemble, Complicite, Clod Ensemble (whose members trained with Lecoq) have creatively and playfully used objects in many of their productions. This is also something that features in the work of contemporary practitioners who draw on Chekhov's form of play such as Zinder and McDermott and his collaborators at Improbable.

## 7. Animals and Play

Following Bing's reflections in relation to objects and animals at the early sessions at Club de Gymnastique Rhythmique, Copeau decides the students should work with animals in the fourth session, which he attends, in relation to Fontaine's fable of the Cat and the Old Rat. In the workshop he encourages the children to explore the animal's movement: 'First, the cat; how does a cat walk?' (9/12/1915, JCA/KC/45). This obviously allowed the children to explore an imaginative and completely embodied transformation into an animal markedly different from their human selves. As Huizinga (1955) points out in his study of play in culture, individual and communal forms of play are present in animal life (p.47) although their forms of play are not restricted by human psychology, socialized patterns and behaviour. The extent of this physical transformation into an animal (who can also play) results in a much broader range of movements in the player, and markedly different ways of moving in and through space. Because the animal is not human, and rational, it also allows for a high level of imaginative engagement which escapes rational justification, although it can easily fit into narrative structures such as Copeau and Bing's fable. This form of transformative play also develops very specific movement qualities, use of energy, space, weight, height and related rhythms, use of breath and distinctive dynamics in relation to other animals and /or human characters. This was the start of a long process of developing animal play by Bing. Donahue notes that whilst with Naumburg in New York Bing noticed that '[m]imicry, especially of animal movements, seemed to catch the children at their most uninhibited (Journal II 87) (Donahue 2001, p.69). Naumburg's reflection on her school's use of animal play is useful here. She describes how she and her staff worked with children on animal exercises and on the way in which play is the foundation for the children's later dramatic work:

In order to get children into pure dramatization of extremely simple roles by means of miming and observation, without speech. This is the kind of thing we do in the lower groups. They begin in their play to imitate familiar animals, bunnies, pussies, dogs, bears and so forth..

14<sup>th</sup> Dialogue – Modern Stage Director and Naumburg - But all children do that to some extent [...]

Yes, but we encourage their first play impulses of imitation by treating them more seriously. We try to get the children absorbed in finding the way to express the unique quality and gesture that distinguishes each animal. Visits of pets to the school and trips by the children to the zoo play an important part in these dramatic games. They are play, but to us they are also serious, as the foundation of their future dramatic work

(1928, p.302)

This explanation of the approach of the school at that time shares a number of key interests shared by Bing's evolving embodied play, namely; the centrality of mimicry and mimesis (and empathy); the use of animal work; observation; identifying unique qualities and gesture; and the perspective that the play is actually serious work, i.e. that play itself can be a method. This interest in animals also clearly dovetails with Bing and Copeau's experiments prior to this date. A more traditional theatre history might seek to identify who was working with animal practice first, but this rather misses the point as the second speaker in the dialogue with Naumburg notes that this is something that can often be observed in children's play generally. It is more useful to recognise this interesting and 'messy' convergence and consider the influence that Naumburg's approach may have had on Bing's work, and vice versa. We also need to be careful of identifying a 'pure' originator in light of Foucault's argument that '[w]hat is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity' (1977A, p.142). Foucault argues that the genealogist discovers that there is 'not a timeless and essential secret' behind things, 'but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms' (ibid). In this context this piecemeal fashioning was clearly facilitated by an interesting act of cross-fertilisation between these women and their different, if not alien, forms and interests.

As has been discussed, Copeau noted, and Bing had directly observed, working with animals is liberating by virtue of the fact that it deals with non-human,

but living beings not operating in rational / human ways. In this sense it is also completely transformative and takes the children away from their own everyday movement habits and range. Naumburg's use of Alexander's ideas and her concerns about lack of understanding of habit and routine is interesting here. She argues that:

For a child as well as an adult can achieve no state of inner liberation for creative activity if his energies are not freed from over-attention to routine by firmly established habits of order and organization. A certain amount of it is necessary to all human adjustment. But beyond this necessary minimum the majority of human lives move, slaves to this over-organization of existence.

(Naumburg 1928, p.77)

However, Naumburg is not claiming that she desires a level of anti-modern utopia here but can see the problems inherent in these patterns in the society of her time '[d]on't misunderstand me, I have no sentimental yearning for a return to nature. I'm not hankering after an irrevocable past. I only feel we must face a deteriorated present, in order to do something about it' (ibid, p.78). The fact that animal play is not restricted by patterns of human, or rational behaviour, establishes a simple play frame that requires the player to explore the form of embodied play in ways that operate outside the habits of order. Arguably, this form of embodied play also frees the player to enter to exist at the *paidia* end of Caillois' play spectrum precisely because we do not have to apply human-rational rules. However, this is not to say that animal play cannot be then developed in a more *ludus* context (i.e. in a more structured or indeed narrative/extended frame).

The reference to the observation and analysis of animals by Naumburg is also of interest here along with her suggestion that the children attempt to identify a unique quality or gesture for the animals. As discussed previously, this idea of being able to identify the essence, spine or silhouette through these forms of embodied play can be seen as central to both Bing and Chekhov's practice. Donahue also notes that whilst the company is at Cedar Court (Morristown), that



Bing 'trained the children of the actors of the Vieux-Colombier to observe birds and to imitate their behaviour' (Journal II 87) (Donahue 2001, p.69). In the notebook *L'École du Vieux Colombier* (16 June 1918) there are a number of brief reflections about the observation of animals, the use of animal fables and the development of the New Comedy that are significant due to the way in which they are related. It discusses the 'observation of a robin on the lawn of Cedar Court' and goes on to suggest that in the New Comedy they could seek 'comparison of the characters of certain types with the appearance of certain animals' (1990, pp.34-35). On the same date it also notes La Fontaine's Fables as a suggestion for future work (ibid). The correlation of animal play with character type is facilitated and extended through the use of the animal fable as a way of 'extending' this form of play. What this indicates is how in addition to animal play developing embodied imagination and giving the children/actors an extended movement vocabulary and range it also offers a different way of looking at, playing with the representation of human characters and simple narrative. Exploring people in relation to a chosen animal provides a very different imaginative frame, and way of viewing people (like Chekhov's suggestion that we try to identify the imaginary centre for people in everyday life, 2002) and simultaneously provides rules for a game. It allows actors to move away from the everyday and ordinary, but also relates clearly to issues of anatomy, physicality, personality, psychology and identity.

Consequently the use of observation with animal work was also to become integrated into the syllabus of the VC school when it re-opened in Paris in 1920 and records indicate that Bing changed very little of the approach when working with young actors. Kusler's study of the school notes that Bing introduced zoo visits and pictures to develop the actors' observational skills and enable them to develop further detail (Kusler 1979, p.21). Evans offers a very useful summary of how this area of actor training matched the schools' aims:

Animal work offered the opportunity to develop several important aspects of the School's pedagogy at the same time: examination of the

dynamics of the natural world; challenging of the student's imaginative resources; exploration of the potential of self-transformation; development of the student's physical skills and control; and the subversion of the inhibiting influence of the intellect. Essentially you are learning about character through the imaginative exploration of mind and body, based on a strong external stimulus. For Copeau this represented an ideal preparation for the task of acting – encouraging a selflessness, transformation, close observation, respect for the source, and imaginative play.

(Evans 2006, pp.130-131)

It is noteworthy that in the Paris school (1920-1924) students were encouraged to make sketches or silhouettes of the animals they were working with as Rudlin explains:

In order to avoid such interventions by the conscious mind during the expressive process, Copeau concluded that the students should work on the natural, instinctive movement of animals, first observing, then drawing them, cutting out their silhouettes and finally finding a ways of adapting their own physique to the resulting outline. Sometimes they would then go on to devise a special prop or accessory to assist the metamorphosis.

(Rudlin 1986, p.43)

Interestingly an object may also be used to help this process of transformation.

What is also apparent is that the children's embodied play facilitated by both Naumburg and Bing et al involved exploration of what we could call embodied character types. This is significant due to the way in which children in this context are playing with broader and freer types of mimesis, or characterization, and developing these types through the process of embodied play rather than attempting to start with a complex character from the outset, which is something that younger children are not necessarily able to achieve, or want to do. Copeau had identified this quality in the children's play at Naumburg's school and the latter reflects on how their exchange provided a theatrical vocabulary to articulate her

work (see Appendix VI). The use of character types in relation to simple narrative frames, as forms of extended play, will be considered further in Chapter 5.

## **8. Rhythmic Play**

Like Bing, Howarth did not leave many records on her own practice with the VC. There is, however, a helpful letter which she wrote in response to questions posed by Norman Paul in 1960. Howarth describes what she did with the company when they were living at Morristown:

I gave the men, the women and the children a class in (I suppose I should call it) gymnastics, every day before breakfast, and we managed to get in a few sessions of improvisation, pantomime and dance instruction. Copeau was not able to be with us all the time, but Suzanne Bing and Dullin were particularly keen, and Charles used a lot of the material we sketched out there in his courses at the 'Atelier' later (which I also supervised on occasion).

(JCA/KC/114/p.2)

Significantly Howarth was also to use games in her teaching of the adult actors following on from the work of Jaques-Dalcroze. Kusler (1979) explains how Copeau intended that Howarth 'work with the actors on period dance, games, and the rudiments of pantomime and eurythmics'. She goes on to note that '[Howarth's] lack of experience with movement training and children's games as part of acting, made her job very difficult. Mme Bing reported that, although some actors relaxed and began to enjoy the dance work, classes were irregularly attended, with some actors in open rebellion' (1979, p.18). See Appendix VIII for Howarth's perspective on Copeau at this time.

Eventually Copeau and Bing both felt that an application of the technique in a pure sense was problematic. Kusler explains that Copeau came to realise that the technique could not be applied in its totality to their system of actor training because it contained what he perceived as a level of affectation (1979, p.18), and

therefore seemed artificial and mannered, creating a distinct and habitual practice which ran contrary to their project. However, a retrospective analysis indicates that in some respects Bing took aspects of the technique and incorporated into a wider method of embodied play that they were to use in the schools in Paris and Burgundy. Kusler notes, at this time Bing and Copeau were: '[...] shifting their focus toward improvisation, games, and movement more in the pantomime tradition. Thus Mme Bing took detailed notes on Mlle Howarth's work in pantomime, which focused on sensory experience, character rhythms, and silhouettes' (1979, p.18). These elements of the experiment were to become part of the school's approach, and what I am terming Bing's embodied play technique and converge with the experiments with, and observation of, play at Naumburg's school. Following the later departure of Erb we can see how Bing's embodied play with the students (including mask work), along with dance classes and the use of transformed Hérbert gymnastics, became the central movement practice of the school. Evans argues that through a process of 'synthesising these influences, Bing was a crucial contributor to Copeau's efforts, helping to draw together his many ideas and principles into a coherent system of actor training' (2006, pp.26-27). He also notes that due to Copeau's absences her 'teaching was effectively the heart and core of the work at the school' (ibid). However, it appears that Bing was not only testing and synthesizing but also transforming and inventing in this process.

Bing was able to observe not only the work of the actors in the company and school/s, but she was also able to observe others teach children in the case of Naumburg and adult actors in the case of Howarth. Kusler acknowledges this when she explains that many of Bing's activities were 'adapted from work that [she] had done with children in 1915/1916, observing and teaching in a Montessori School [sic] in New York in 1917/18, or observing Mlle Howarth work with the Vieux-Colombier actors in the United States' (1979 p.20). Crucially she was able to participate in the sessions with Howarth herself and embody the experiments.

Bing's rejection of the technique in its totality came from both internal and embodied experience and external observation and seems to have helped her refine what it was they were actually trying to achieve in relation to the development of embodied play. Bing argues: 'The possibility of using music for exercises in bodily technique has been confirmed by Dalcroze's Rhythmic Gymnastics [...] However, a natural incompatibility very soon developed between this conventional form of gymnastics and the hidden musical feeling' (JCA/KC/46, Bing's undated paper on Bodily Technique circa summer 1920, pp.102). Her concerns centre on the way in which this technique, based on systematic external musical notion, becomes the 'equivalent to translating what was audible into the visible bodily notation' (ibid). She argues that:

musical notation is a systemization that impoverishes, imprisons and dries up the inner feeling of the Rhythm [...] It is not the number (and variety) of rhythmic combinations which can favor rhythmic sense (the value of and opportunity for a period of silence). This sense must come from inside. Exercises are always unsatisfactory if they are not used exclusively to exercise the outer manifestation of the inner sense that one wants to develop.

(ibid)

Bing feels that when Jaques-Dalcroze 'deals with the human body, it is in order to incorporate what he has learned from this music by means of a conventional muscular translations of that music's conventional signs. In this way, there is also a reduction of bodily expression: a kind of graphics' (ibid) and she explains that this is not appropriate for their project which is looking for this internal feeling of rhythm that can be used for and in play. Indeed, she comes to recognise that it has not been possible to make a link between Jaques-Dalcroze's technique and 'the free improvisation created, suggested, by a child's play (le jeu d'enfant), the interior music of this play, as one could put it' (Copeau/Sicard 2000 p.114).

However, there appear to be two areas of Dalcroze technique that Bing retains, but transforms and uses as a catalyst to invent with. Firstly, there is the

use of rhythm (both inner and outer) in relation to these different facets of embodied play, and secondly there is the use and transformation of musical concepts in a broader embodied play framework. There is little available information on the details of the various courses offered in the Paris school (see Kusler 1979) but there are Bing's notes on her classes in 'Diction' that ran from December 1920 to July 1921 which Kusler summarizes: '[a]ctivities of the diction class incorporated elements of play and improvisation in movement and sound by developing an "inner notation" or sense of character rhythm and over-all rhythmic dramatic structure' (Kusler 1979, 20). She goes on to provide an analysis of the approach which is useful here, notwithstanding the questionable assumption that Bing was simply 'formulating' Copeau's method:

The work was an attempt on Mme Bing's part to formulate the method or theory of actor training that Copeau was seeking. Her notes focus particularly on educating the senses, especially the kinaesthetic sense, or, as Copeau put it, making the students more conscious of the feelings accompanying an action. She defines the kinaesthetic sense as including notions of "space" and "movement" incorporating ideas of "force and duration, place, orientation, balance, lightness, heaviness, gentleness, elasticity, resistance, direction," and "independence." Notes also indicate an emphasis on developing the "musical sense".

(Kusler 1979, p. 21)

Rudlin's descriptions of some of Bing's later exercises demonstrate this creative use rhythmic play:

One of Bing's exercises was to begin an action and then interrupt it with a brief movement. The students then worked to juxtapose two different tempos – the arms keeping the beat whilst the feet walked in a circle on the measure, accompanying themselves with the voice instead of music. Examples of everyday phenomena were found to illustrate different tempos...Early in the New Year rhythms were introduced based on regular intervals as exemplified in drawing, poetry and prose, architecture and music. The group clapped different rhythms, imitating each other, then putting polyrhythms together.

(Rudlin 2000, p.69)

This form of embodied play is both technically demanding but playful; indeed the last exercise is reminiscent of many children's clapping games.

There is also the use of isolation in the way in which the actors are using different body parts to generate/follow different rhythms. Kusler also notes how Bing was to develop isolation exercises as a form of creative play: 'Mme Bing used isolated movements of parts of the body to express attitudes, working towards finding the essence of a character' (1979, p.21) and this mirrors Chekhov's suggestion to actors that they can incorporate just one part of the body at a time in relation to various 'grounds' for play such as the Imaginary Centre. Rudlin's description of the group compositions that Bing developed with the students are also helpful here in particular because of the way in which musical concepts are used as the 'rules' for this form of play:

Group compositions were performed in silence, then with accompanying piano music – an addition which highlighted plastic rather than the dramatic qualities. These were followed by a study of dynamics – visualising loudness and softness in space for example. Eventually these exercises were used in the creation of dances. Exercises in 'taking possession of space' were also an important element, to which was added expansion in sound and the exploration of shapes – individually and in a group. Later they did exercises related to obedience to a particular rhythm, standing in a circle and using a ball thrown in patterns to reinforce the concept.

(Rudlin 2000, p.70)

The references to visualizing loudness and softness in space are interesting here in that this form of play develops a technique but also retains a level of imaginative freedom. The application of musical terms into a visualized, embodied and / or spatial dimension (the rules of the game) does not follow a purely logical system and it is dependent on the actor's imaginative interpretation. It is not overly prescriptive and yet will develop quite specific performance skills. Throwing the ball in relation to particular rhythms takes us back to the early experiments with the Dalcroze teachers that Bing worked with in 1915 and is reminiscent of Chekhov's

work with actors in Russia. Kusler's analysis is useful: 'Bing's method [...] was usually to institute a somewhat abstract exercise or game involving the body or a musical concept and then to apply that concept to a dramatic character and situation. Thus, after working to develop essential character traits, the students improvised simple scenes with each other' (1979, p. 21). This would indicate that some of these games were played independently first, then used in relation to a set character and situation, and could eventually be extended into simple improvised scenes with other actors. The exploration of real and imagined space, sound and shape (and qualities of movement) through embodied play, and the use of ball in relation to rhythmic play, are also reminiscent of a number of Chekhov's play methods (2002).

In addition to a broad exploration of rhythm, musical concepts and music, Kusler also notes that simple characters were developed through embodied play based on children's songs: '[s]imple characters were initiated through children's song's like "Frère Jacques," with one actor playing Jacques asleep, the others singing softly, then louder, amplifying their movement as the sound augmented' (Kusler, 1979, p.20). This use of musical and rhythmical concepts was also used by Bing to develop spoken improvisation using words '[t]hey then worked to find simple characteristic verbal phrases for the characters' (ibid, pp. 31-32).

What Bing was doing with the aspects of Dalcroze that she transformed was to take away the rigidity of that kind of codified and stylized system and used some of the more creative and flexible potential through a process of embodied play, the interior music of children's play. In addition, Bing was also able to observe the children's games and pantomimes being taught by Howarth and reflect on why her teaching approach and techniques did not seem to work within the context of the VC's project with actors. Crucially then Bing was not only observing the outcomes of Howarth's work (and the technique) but also the play-enabling method and style



she used. So whilst Howarth's contribution was seen as a 'failure' Bing may have learnt and gained a great deal from the experience.

In addition to borrowing and transforming selected approaches to rhythm and musicality from Dalcroze and the work carried out by Howarth and Erb for her developing forms of embodied play, Bing was also to draw on various dance (including ballet) and gymnastic concepts and techniques taught by other collaborators. As Rudlin has argued her approach was 'somewhat reminiscent of Laban and modern dance exploration' (2000, p.70).<sup>18</sup> As Kusler notes, Bing's *musique corporelle* class (taught 1922/23) immediately followed Lucienne Lamballe's dance class 'thus integrating basic dance concepts with musical ones' (Kusler 1979, p36).<sup>19</sup> Rudlin's description of Bing's exercises explicates this and in relation to this analysis also demonstrates how the development of these techniques were underpinned and taught within a broader embodied play method. Indeed, the work culminates in a well known imaginative embodied form of play carried out by children:

Bing began by focussing on breathing and filling a particular duration with breath. Next she added movements, to be accomplished in the same duration. These simple exercises grew into movements on beats, with some complex assignments given to fill time sequences with improvised dialogue or mimed action. She then had the students analyse and explore the relationships between emotional quality of a gesture and its time of preparation – first with breathing, then movement, using various parts of the body, stressing imagination, continuity and unity of direction. This method developing gesture was then continued in ensemble movement and in movement sequences. Later they played 'Follow my Leader' in order to become instinctive at performing actions together within the same time sequence.

(Rudlin 2000, p.69)

Rudlin also discusses the way in which Bing decided to use piano accompaniment to develop the students' play and he cites the mirror game and the miming of opening the door as examples in this context. He argues that Bing enabled

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<sup>18</sup> Chamberlain's (2004) observation of Chekhov's archetypal gesture paralleling some aspects of Laban's technique is interesting in this respect.

<sup>19</sup> Lambelle taught classical ballet technique (1922-1924).

students to discover the 'difference between choreographed movement to music, or dance, and that which is performed with an internal rhythm and no music, i.e. corporeal mime. Music gave their movements greater purity and abstraction, but often blurred the dramatic sense' (Rudlin 2000, p.70). It is evident that she was experimenting with music and notions of internal and external rhythm in relation to forms of specifically embodied play in addition to what was to become known as Corporeal Mime (which can be understood as embodied play at the ludus pole). This centrality of rhythm in this form of embodied play also corresponds to its significance in Chekhov's forms of play (see du Prey 1978, pp.14-15). The combination of these influences developed an expanded vocabulary for Bing's forms of embodied play (for example, notions of shape, weight, intensity, speed, volume, etc.) which were not traditionally used in relation to acting technique and helped her to develop specific skills in actors in addition to enabling forms of play that could help them create performance in addition to simply interpreting existing plays.

## **9. Play-enabling**

It is evident that as early as 1915 at least Bing was experimenting with different ways of enabling play. Bing reflects on teaching the children Jaques-Dalcroze rounds (11 Nov 1915) and observing their progress. They also work with 'Military exercises' (Copeau notes one of his own instructions for this 'Line up, march' 02/12/1915, JCA/KC/45) and at the same session with balls, unison movement. The following week they use a number of children's games such as leapfrog (09/12/1915, JCA/KC/45). During this time Bing is reflecting on how these different components work in their sessions, how they could interrelate and what order, or progressive development, might be most productive. For example, Bing notes 'We are aware of that excitement that comes right after Rhythmics, which makes us delay in getting dressed, which plunges us back into the room when we hear the piano, to leap around, to dance, to improvise' (25 Nov 1915),

developing observational awareness of the types of energy and dynamics the various games and exercises create.<sup>20</sup> Concurrently, the differences between Bing and Copeau's pedagogic approaches were also becoming apparent despite their shared goal. Whilst Copeau claims: 'Everything must be based on discipline: keeping these children in hand. The goal: perfectly supple and nuanced instruments. Powerful also. Living instruments answering to the thought of the leader and master' (02/12/1915, JCA/KC/45, underlining in original). Bing reflects '[t]hose military exercises are a nightmare for me; I was slow, uneasy, but authoritarian' but she notes 'I shall make progress' (9/12/1915, *ibid*). Rather than leading the students to answer to her 'thought' as the 'leader and master' she articulates a different approach which relates to facilitating experiential and student (actor)-centred process. This is exemplified by her comments on one session 'I realized that I was keeping too close to them in almost everything' (23/12/1915 *ibid*) implying something more flexible and less disciplined was needed. As Donahue notes: '[Bing] looked for spontaneity in the children that could be used effectively to devise improvisation exercises; Copeau looked for results. For Bing, the process was more important than the results' (2008, p.110). This parallels Chekhov's recognition of the importance of process and how important it was for actors to try to retain an element of autotelic play. Donahue claims that 'Bing already understood the value of "theatre games" – more precisely, the importance of improvisation' (2008, p.111). Whilst Donahue has identified this fundamental difference I would argue that rather than understanding the use of theatre games to develop discrete techniques (improvisation, mask, etc) this study would suggest that Bing was developing a form of embodied play, which was to become a significant underlying principle that was to run through the various processes of training and the processes of theatre-making itself. As Copeau himself notes after

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<sup>20</sup> Gordon notes how Chekhov also used specific blocks of exercises and games some of which had a 'party feel' to them, i.e. what I am terming play, to produce 'a rush of exhilaration or energy in his students' (1985, p.18) and that this enabled them to keep a sense of 'aliveness' in performance.

the second session (the first he attended) it is this use of a particular type of play that they seek:

Only Suzanne Bing understands what I want to do, and gives of herself to me with all her might. From now on, Bing will take on the 4<sup>th</sup> part of the lesson, the games. And, every fortnight, when I am there, I shall take them over. It is there, somewhere between the games and the rhythmic activities, that the initial starting point is to be found for a new method.

(18/11/1915, JCA/KC/45)

The form of embodied play developed by Bing was related to the concomitant style of play-enabling that was needed to facilitate this practice. Copeau could see what was needed to enable play and in 1917 he wrote:

We observe children at play. They teach us. Learn everything from children. Impose nothing on them. Take nothing away from them. Help them in their development without their being aware of it [...] All this is difficult to describe, because it is still in a state of experimentation, nothing dogmatic. Inspired from life and human contact [...] Aim for nothing less than making the actor not only the medium, but the source of all dramatic inspiration.

(Copeau 1990, p.12)

As Rudlin notes, Copeau had also translated an extract from one of Jaques-Dalcroze's pamphlets into his own notebooks: 'It is the pupil who should teach the master, not the master the pupil. The role of the master should rather be to reveal to the pupil what he has taught him' (Copeau in Rudlin 1986, p.38). However, as we have seen from the notes of the very first play experiments, Copeau was not able to fully develop these play-enabling skills but was to rely on Bing in this respect. It was therefore crucial that Bing was able to work with someone like Naumburg who was developing her own forms of play-enabling and had a personal style that acted as a counter-balance to Copeau. Donahue argues that the 'most important lesson Bing derived from [working with Naumburg] was the need to observe the children at play in order to ascertain which exercises could be best suited for training in the theater, and to remain non-judgmental in regard to the

children's activities, even though she found it difficult at times' (Donahue 2008, p.121). His research also discusses Bing's handwritten copy of Montessori's texts in her notes from her time in New York:

The text places emphasis on the need for observation of the child – admonition that Bing obviously took to heart. In the text, Montessori says that from the children themselves, the observer “will learn how to perfect himself as an educator” (CO). And in her conclusion, which Bing copied in French, Montessori insists that: “all methods of experimental psychology can be reduced to only one: observation” (CO). During these sessions at the school [...] Bing began to elaborate certain features of a pedagogy she would expand fully during the years when the School of the Vieux-Colombier was definitively established in Paris.

(Donahue 2008, p.121)

However, Bing did not gain this pedagogical approach, or as I am arguing, a specific method of play-enabling, purely through a reading of Montessori's text. As previously discussed, Naumburg's approach was actually much more play-based than her former teacher's (see Appendix VI). At Naumburg's school Bing was able to watch, and be challenged by, other pedagogues seeking to enable play. Like Jaques-Dalcroze, Naumburg believed that this type of play-based learning requires a specific type of pedagogic approach related to the centrality of observation and the learner-centred focus. She argues ‘there is nothing more difficult to develop in teachers than the power to hold hands off, when necessary, and yet remain active, observant, and responsive to all the interests and needs of their class’ (1928, p.85). Donahue (2008) notes that Bing developed her work at this time through a process of trial and error and at first ‘did not quite know how to involve herself in their games without disturbing the dynamics amongst the children’ (p.120). This notion of respecting the ways to enable and develop the dynamics of playing, without over-controlling the process, represents a key skill in play-enabling. Arguably this requires a specific control of the play-enabler's ego, in a manner similar to the player, i.e. it is not self-dominated. He also notes that Naumburg gave her specific feedback that ‘perhaps [she] proposed activities that were too

complex' and that the children did not always understand what she wanted (2008, p.120). It is also significant that he notes that '[m]usic was frequently at the center of these activities, but Bing did not want it to be always the points of departure for the children's movements' (ibid). As we have seen the ability to start with more simple starting points, which may evolve into something more complex, is a key aspect of embodied play and this is clearly something which the encounter with Naumburg helped Bing to develop. This requires a level of trust in the process itself and patience on the part of the play-enabler.

Donahue also highlights what he perceives as the difference of approach between the two women: '[Bing] and Frank [sic] disagreed on the principles of children's psychology and appropriate pedagogy. Mrs. Frank responded [that Bing's suggestion] was not in accord with the spirit of her work [...] "we do it differently, not at all intellectual"' (ibid). Donahue explains that this conflict related to Naumburg's belief that the teacher should not impose any activity on the child but that the child should be allowed to develop through spontaneous activities including drawing, dancing, etc., as the beginning of play and that through them 'much of the material of primitive thinking is brought forth symbolically by the child long before language and writing become accessible as a means of free expression' (2008, p.120). However, Bing was ultimately developing a form of embodied play to use with actors which was never going to be totally autotelic and therefore she would always be imposing specific play frames. However, I would argue that Naumburg's radical position, regarding a more free form of play and allowing space for non-verbal play early in the process, probably helped Bing to let go of the rather controlled and regimented approach adopted by Copeau with the children in Paris, and that his role as the Patron, often brought with it to the VC School and Theatre. Indeed Bing notes some years later that Copeau's 'occasional presence [at the school] seemed to paralyse the students – a freezing of the blood again!' (in Kusler 1974 pp.132-133, cited by Rudlin 2000, p.70). Naumburg's anti-intellectual approach was also a healthy contrast to Copeau's

literary and intellectual approach that Jouvett had critiqued in the early years and was perhaps more in line with Chekhov. Whilst Bing's embodied play was always framed, there was considerable space for her actors to work with spontaneity and perhaps this encounter enabled her to find this subtle balance. This returns us to the argument that these forms of play, and play-enabling are perhaps more enabling of what Cixous defines as the 'feminine' than other play practices.

Related to the development of effective, and more radical, form of play-enabling is the willingness to establish collaborative practice and empowerment of the actor-students. Bing was clearly inspired by the children's willingness to engage in real collaborative play at Naumburg's school and, as Donahue (2008) notes, this provided a contrasting model to the VC company's problematic personal dynamics and power struggles at the time. Later records indicate effective collaborative practice amongst the students at the Paris and Burgundy schools, which Bing effectively led. Sicard notes that Bing wanted a 'family spirit' to rule in the group and he argues that in the accounts of the school: '[O]ne will be aware of l'esprit that she imbued, brought the school to life with, of her manner of bringing into being good harmony in the group with brotherly, fraternal relationships that the disparity in age and previous intellectual education could well have rendered problematic' (Copeau/Sicard 2000, p.21). Bing was responsible for introducing celebrations for birthdays and playful festivals in the community after the move from Paris and it was she who composed the commandments and the school song (Sicard 2000, p.21). These events and festivals centred on play, as Kusler explains they used 'improvisations, song, dancing, games, and the presentation of new work' (1979, p.51). In addition to being, what we would now define as, a self-reflexive practitioner or play-enabler, Bing also introduced arrangements in the school to encourage students to reflect on their practice.

Ultimately Bing's sophisticated approach to play-enabling also extended the forms of play as a way of teaching the actors to create performance. Copeau had explained in relation to the school's syllabus '[u]ltimately, free play gives way to small-scale productions for which people are entirely left to their own devices, as creators and workers' (Copeau in Rudlin 2000, p.60). This led to systems of extended play in their form of actor training, which will be discussed in chapter five. Ultimately these forms of extended play were used by the later companies as methods of devising theatre for professional performances. However, whilst this idea of actors being creators was a shared goal in relation to their development of embodied play Copeau did not always seem able to follow the inherent logic of being a play-enabler to consistently give this freedom to his collaborators and students, nor did he commit the consistent embodied time to develop these skills. It was perhaps that Copeau viewed it as 'women's work' (Cattanach's 1992). Rudlin argues that 'Copeau had been too busy making theatre (and making it pay) to follow up his own playing proposition' (Rudlin 1996, p.19). This thesis argues that it was not simply a case of being too busy to develop play in this capacity; Copeau did not have the play-enabling skills or desire to do this, and ultimately he was ambivalent about embracing a changed relationship to the text and ways of generating performance that embodied play led to. Rudlin (2000) notes that although Copeau believed in 'laissez jouer' he was not able to participate in the later stages of the development of what had really become Bing's embodied form of play and that '[h]e had always maintained that his work was provisional and preparatory: [...] It may be that the future came too close, or that he had a temperamental preference for disillusion and preferred to leave it to others to claim the domain which he had helped to discover' (p.75). Evans argues that, for Copeau, 'games functioned as a stimulus for imaginative play and not as a dramatic form in their own right' (2006, p.67) and this is perhaps where the fundamental split occurs. Bing's extended embodied play methods were to generate practices and a genealogy of performance (embodied theatre, corporeal mime, new mime, physical theatre) that were ultimately forms of more radical play.



To some extent the play-enabler has to be able to relinquish the dominance of their personal ego in the process, in a similar manner to the way in which actors follow the 'rules' or frame within these forms of embodied play. This is not to say that the play-enabler does not have a form of control, but that it operates differently. Whilst we should not present play-enabling in romantic terms (there are many ethical issues related to different styles of play enabling) we do need to acknowledge that the type of control and power that is used in this technique is markedly different to Copeau's patriarchal practice. Whilst the social constructs of bourgeois masculinity in the early twentieth century may not have been obviously compatible with this type of play-enabling, we need to avoid an essentialist position here and recall that Chekhov was able to enable play effectively and in a markedly different way than Copeau. The way in which Copeau talks about the company's work and his role over the years explicates his perspective on his role and power. Rudlin explains how once the company had moved to Paris and opened the formal school (1921) 'Copeau [...] saw himself as the father of an extended family unified by a common belief in a new dramatic order: a theatre community' (Rudlin 1986, p.42). Rudlin's description of how he managed the actors and family members is also telling in this respect:

With the Vieux-Colombier actors, too, he preferred to be paternal rather than dictatorial, but although he loved the child-like in them, he was exasperated by the childish [...] He tried to lead by example, being his own best actor and pupil, though he was too set in his ways and too busy to participate in learning the new approach to performance that was being evolved at the school.

(1986, p.42)

The notion of the 'paternal' here, whilst presented as being better than merely being 'dictatorial', returns us to Clarke's critique of the way in which theatre practices and writings (and therefore histories) have often accepted, and indeed revered, a particular type notion of the 'strict father' (2009, p.27). In the context of a

Feminist Historiography the notion of the paternal that Copeau fostered was problematic.

The fact that Copeau was 'too set in his ways' indicates that he did not have the core skills and attitudes needed for play-enabling. That he was too busy to actively be involved in the training already creates a power and role division which is inherently problematic. After the VC closed and the core group of collaborators had moved to Burgundy, Copeau converted to Roman Catholicism and this added to the specific way that he constructed his role, and imposed his beliefs. As Kusler explains, Copeau saw himself as their 'spiritual guide' (1979, p.50). Rudlin provides an excellent discussion of Copeau's position at this time and notes that the actors/collaborators were expected to 'accept poverty as a condition of discipleship' and that they would need to follow his general principles on the morality of the artist which would be reflected in the 'rules for the school and the house. He could only work if these rules were observed, since freedom would only come from regulation and observance' (1986, p.85). However, as has already been discussed we need to remember that play practice needs to be offered, and engaged with pleasure and ease and not be something that is insisted on (although paradoxically it can be very hard work). In some respects Copeau's attitude was the complete antithesis of embodied play and it becomes ever more apparent that this strand of practice could not have been developed if Bing had not been a core collaborator. As Decroux explains:

Among those who know the history of this theatre, there are many who know nothing about its school [...] There are so many things to tell about it! [...] And above all: The role of Suzanne Bing, our formidable leader. Zealously rising to the demands of her task, she forgot herself in its execution. And she is forgotten. The running of a drama school worthy of the name presupposes the presence of an exceptional being, about whom it would be impossible to say: "If she hadn't been there, someone else would have taken her place." Without her, the school would have remained nothing more than a project, or ended up like the others: chaos. My own profound experience with schools, already spanning sixteen years, entitles me to say, without being accused to yielding to the pleasure of euphoria: Without Suzanne Bing, there was no one.

Given this hypothesis, Copeau would have devoted himself to his theatre – a perpetual fire that one becomes obsessed with extinguishing – and the school would not have seen the light of day. At any rate, not that day. Thus everything which originated in this austere and marvellous hut would not have come forth into the world.

(Decroux 1985, p.1)

Decroux also notes the significance of the work of Dasté during this period and the way in which her collaborative and playing style linked, and balanced, those of Bing and Copeau (1985, pp.2-3, see Appendix VII).

After he disbanded the VC Company Copeau's relationship with the subsequent company, LC, remained complex and demonstrates the same power relations. After initially giving the company independence he later changed his position and reclaimed a considerable amount of control, although as Rudlin notes Bing and Jean Dasté remained responsible for the training (2000, p.62). Villard reportedly said that Copeau 'was unable to entertain the idea that we [the company] could be independent from him' (cited in Rudlin 1986, p.89). Rudlin notes that Dasté 'remembers her father's decision to take over the company as being based on a suspicion that the Copiaus were about to turn their back on his work principles' and explains that '[h]e threaten[ed] to take his circle of family and dependents away if his demands were not met' (Rudlin 1986, p.88). This demonstrates the way in which he perceived his family as being within his control, or ownership and therefore assumed a particular type of devotion from them. This is also mirrored in the way in which he wrote about Dasté (1990, pp.246-247). Ultimately it was Bing who was able to work in a markedly different manner to Copeau, despite being his closest and most consistent collaborator, and she was therefore able to develop an inspirational form of play-enabling which developed this form of embodied play.

## 10. Gender, Play and Absence

Bing, Naumburg, Dasté and Howarth were all bourgeois women and consequently had a certain level of class privilege. However, they were all working at a time when it was still unusual for women of their class to choose to work, especially after having children, but unlike many of their feminist contemporaries, they were not necessarily directly engaged in political activity or campaigning. The contrast of their experiences with their male counterparts is quite startling. For example Bing was forced to leave her children in France for some time in order to move to New York with the VC whilst Copeau and their male collaborators had their families with them. To some extent their work in the theatre may have given them license to step away from the hegemonic perception of women's roles at that time but at the same time, each of them have been made absent in this specific history of actor training. In addition to this, all four women contributed to a strand of practice, embodied play, which was in radical opposition to much of the theatre practice of their time. Consequently there was a radicalism in this form of play even though it did not have to be used for radical production aesthetic or thematic.

The continued reliance of theatre, performance and even to some extent actor training histories on evaluations of canonical theatre productions presents a major challenge when trying to reveal these significant, but more obscured, contributions to actor training. Firstly, none of these women worked primarily as theatre directors and secondly production histories are often problematic in terms of how the work is evaluated as successes or failures. Indeed the consideration of Chekhov's work suffers from the same problem, as whilst he did direct productions, this was not necessarily the major contribution he made to the development of embodied theatre. In earlier theatre histories Bing is quite literally absent or merely mentioned in passing. In many of the appendices on Copeau's key collaborators she is missing. At the end of the Kurtz biography, there is a précis of the background and subsequent work of Dullin and Jouvét but nothing on Bing let

alone the other women. At the same time a number of the much improved, and extremely useful, accounts of Bing and the other female collaborators contributions are still problematic in their suggested reasons for the women's absence. Donahue's (2008) description of Bing's role in subservient and powerless terms demonstrates this problem as he argues that she 'continued to be an acolyte in Copeau's quasi-spiritual pursuit of theatrical purity' (p.124) and goes on to claim that '[i]n many ways, the trajectory of their lives did not change after their return to Europe: Agnès remained the devoted mother and spouse; Bing, the adoring handmaiden who spent her life working in the theater in the shadow of Copeau' (pp. 124–125). Whilst Donahue provides the best analysis of Bing's work thus far his summation of her role still contains her within these problematic historical structures:

She is remembered today as the most ardent believer in Copeau's concepts of the theater and as an important influence on the development of pedagogy in the theater in France. Without her, Copeau would not have realized his dream of founding the school of the Vieux-Colombier in Paris that trained so many who in turn influenced the development of actor training in the period between the two world wars and after (R6, 20).

(2008, p.125)

Bing did support Copeau and helped to facilitate his vision, but her development of embodied play did much more than this. Her practice led not only to the development of Modern Mime but also to this potentially radical form of embodied play and play enabling. Crucially, she also nurtured many young practitioners who were to further extend and develop this French genealogy of embodied play in relation to embodied theatre making in both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A willingness to engage with a more radical re-evaluation of the work of Bing and her female collaborators does not just re-address their under representation but also extends the scholarship of this area of actor training. The next chapter will discuss how Bing helped to develop ways to extend embodied

play to train actors as creators in their own right, and how this fed directly into the work of LC and CQ.

## Chapter 5: Extending Embodied Play

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### 1. Introduction

The previous chapters have analysed how Bing et al and Chekhov used various forms of embodied play in their actor training programmes in order to teach a wide variety of discrete, and connected, acting skills and for character creation. However, of equal importance was the way in which both practitioners, and their close collaborators, developed sophisticated ways of extending and blending these forms of play through the use of various creative frames to enable the student-actors to create small scale performances as part of their training. The extended use of these methods is what enabled Bing et al and Chekhov to train actors to be creative artists, in their own right, rather than merely performers who interpret the materials and the dominant visions of others. Copeau, Bing and their collaborators articulated in the early aims of their school that their trainee actors would move from 'free play' to the creation of performances in which they would be 'entirely left to their own devices, as creators and workers' (Copeau in Rudlin 2000, p.60). Similarly we recall that Chekhov had argued that performers should be placed at the heart of the theatre-making process. Like Bing, Copeau and their colleagues, Chekhov also designed a holistic training for the actor as an artist, a 'theatre maker'. He argues 'an actor should, to some degree, be also a director, a scene painter, a costume designer, and even an author and musician' (Chekhov archives cited by Black 1987, p.29). This notion of the actor as artist able to both interpret but also create and even direct and write/create their own work, all fed into the more extended forms of play that Chekhov was also drawing on in his approach to actor training.

This chapter presents an analysis of the pedagogical strategies they used to facilitate a more complex application and an extension of, their methods of embodied play and a selection of the materials, tools and frames they used in

this context. It considers how they tested these forms of extended play in relation to a wide range of modes, genres and styles of performance in the context of highly collaborative ensemble practice. These experiments in extended, and highly embodied, play also led to radical relationships to texts and writers. This included the selection of, and ways of exploring/adapting, texts and working with writers as members of collaborative companies. Ultimately many of these forms of extended play were to be directly used by Bing, Chekhov and their collaborators in early forms of devised practice which led to public performance. The integral connection between the performances of extended play in the training context and this later work for public audiences also needs to be considered.

## **2. Playmates and Cross-fertilisation**

It is necessary to once again trace the way in which this practice built on, and was fed by, various collaborations with other artists in this genealogy. Crucially this includes the application of, and experimentation with, these forms of extended play by their students (or former students) and how they helped to develop the practice initiated by their teachers.

### **2.1 Bing's Playmates**

There is a particularly complex web of relationships and practices surrounding Bing's use of embodied play with her various collaborators with the VC and LC schools and companies (1920-1929) and later CQ (1929-1934). Kusler's (1979) research has shown that after the move to Burgundy in 1924 Bing continued to be the central pedagogue of the schools, but after this time she also returned to acting as a company member using the forms of extended embodied play. Bing's work in the Paris school (1920-1924) was an important transitional phase as they started to use extended forms of embodied play in order to generate small-scale performance as part of the actors' training. We know that Bing was teaching/supervising early forms of extended play as part of



different courses at the school. Kusler notes that her class called Diction (1922-1923) covered extensive work on fables, verse plays and various mimes (1979, p.37). Bing, Dasté and Dorcy also 'helped' Copeau teach the course on Stage Instruction (1923-1924) which covered the initial preparation of the students for creative work (using what I am terming the various methods of embodied play) and then 'improvisation' and ensemble practice through 'adherence to basic structure through games, charades, and stories as well as improvisation' (Kusler 1979, p.42), i.e. what I am arguing were flexible frames for extended play. In addition to enabling the apprentice students to use their embodied play methods to generate performance she also taught/directed the masked chorus work (*The Little Demons*) that had been developed from group play with non-human movement which was used for the VC production of *Saul* (1922), written by Andre Obey, and this represented the first transfer of the use of this type of extended masked play into professional performance. Bing and the students then took this material further, drawing on their work with Hébert gymnastics, to create the students' end of year production *Play of Little Demons* (1922). She also enabled the students to develop various early performances (*The Sailor, War, Psyche*) which were to be returned to in terms of theme, style of play and materials in the later work of LC and CQ. Significantly, she also studied and directed the students in a Nō Theatre production of *Kantan* before the closure of the Paris school in 1924. Crucially the spirit and practice of these forms of extended embodied play starts to enter the realm of professional performance after the move to Burgundy in 1924. The combination of Copeau's vision of the New Comedy and Bing's development of the methods of embodied and extended play, that were needed to make this a reality, started to converge despite Copeau's ambivalence at times about the outcomes of this project. Rudlin (1986) argues that Copeau's move away from his belief in the supremacy of the text towards a theory of action in these later years resulted in the text they used having 'little value except as action' (p.93). Whilst these texts may have had little value in Rudlin's terms, what these productions did was to start to engage with, and give space for, a more radical form of extended embodied play.

As Bing transmitted this practice through embodied and creative encounters with students and collaborators, rather than through her own independent written texts, and because of the dominance of the paternal historical narratives about this French experiment there has not been an adequate analysis of the relationship between the development of these extended methods of play in the training context and the devising processes developed by LC and CQ. Bing's contributions to these later phases of practice are masked by the higher status roles that Saint-Denis (and at times Villard) were awarded, or claimed, and their written accounts of events. Because of this, Saint-Denis's move away from, and then return to, a notion of the writer/text being central to theatre creation has also meant that consideration of these later practices are too simplistically correlated to his personal ideas and desires, leaving a gap in this area of scholarship. A genealogical account requires a level of deconstruction of the historical records (including those written by Saint-Denis) and a willingness to read in-between the lines to piece the materials together differently in order to gain a better overall picture and to challenge this continuation of a paternal history. Whilst Saint-Denis only became a full member of the school-company after the move in 1924, he nonetheless was to learn, and develop, this strand of embodied, and extended, play that had been developed by Bing and her various collaborators over the previous eleven years. He also contributed to its development, in line with his personal beliefs. He worked passionately with mask in Burgundy which led to performances for LC, and for periods of time he was the director for the company. When he later founded CQ with Bing and others and they were to continue drawing on the various forms of extended play. Sadly Saint-Denis' accounts of this early work (1960, 1982) do not acknowledge this application of the forms of extended play that Bing had been using in the training context in clear terms. Nor does he note that it was Bing who was to remain with all the three companies, as the most experienced actor, director and pedagogue or that the former students had all been trained and mentored by her, in this form of extended embodied play. What is shocking is that he does not reference

Bing in any capacity at all in these publications. Whilst this appears extremely ungracious at best, and extremely egotistical at worst, his re-telling of the past certainly maintains the pattern of female absence in the later stage of this French paternal theatre narrative. Indeed, Saint-Denis argues: 'Here, in my view, is the main contribution of France to the theatre: men, and a tradition' (1960, p.31). Whilst Saint-Denis did write a tribute to Bing, this is held in specialist archives and was not something put into wider professional circulation (British Library Saint-Denis Archive 81135, Vol XLV, ff). It is unfortunate that some scholars have supported Saint-Denis' selective narrative, Baldwin (2010) for example, maintains that Saint-Denis' time with 'Copeau' was critical for his development and she argues that he 'borrowed freely from [Copeau's] concepts, which he augmented, clarified, and to a degree systematised' (p.82). Baldwin is justified arguing that between 1924-1929 Copeau was not an effective, consistent or integral leader of the companies, but her claim that Saint-Denis stepped in to fill this 'void' (ibid, p.82) simply erases Bing's work, her expertise, and her form of embodied play which the younger man was to draw on. This chapter will therefore seek to re-consider Bing's contribution in line with Decroux's (1985) position that without her, and Dasté, there would not have been the various schools and by extension no consistent development of extended play for the later companies to draw on in their new methods of theatre-making.

## **2.2 Chekhov's Playmates**

Chekhov had exchanged practices with, and borrowed ideas from, various artists and thinkers including Sulerzhitsky, Stanislavsky, Vakhtangov, Meyerhold and Steiner during his early years in Russia and this certainly contributed to the development of aspects of his embodied play. Whilst in Germany Chekhov worked with George Shdanoff at his 'home studio' and this young actor was to go on to assist Chekhov in his later work in Britain and in North America. Crucially Shdanoff also agreed to take on the role of collaborative writer in the experiments with forms of extended play at the

Michael Chekhov Studio. Whilst Chekhov's two seasons in Paris, seeking to develop what he had hoped would be an 'ideal theatre', were clearly unsuccessful and disappointing for him on a number of levels he was to undertake a daring experiment with Georgette Boner; the mounting of *The Castle Awakens* in 1931, an adaptation of one of Tolstoy's fairytales (which had been based on Russian folktales). As Marowitz notes (2004) both Chekhov and Boner 'had a strong interest in fairytales, and together they researched mythological source materials that would resurface prominently in Chekhov's work' (p.121). This interest feeds directly into many of the extended play frames that Chekhov developed and used at the studio, as will be discussed later. The support of Boner, Straight and du Prey contributed greatly to the development of what I am terming his embodied, and extended, forms of play at the Studio at Dartington and Ridgefield.

Chekhov was joined by Straight and du Prey at the studio who became and remained, seminal collaborators until his death. Straight and du Prey's involvement with the studio was particularly important as they were not only student actors, but they were also trained as teachers by Chekhov and led a number of the student-led projects in what I am terming extended play. The latter also enabled the documentation of the work at the studio through taking shorthand notes of Chekhov's classes and comments. Boner also contributed to the school by giving lectures to the students on key subjects such as Commedia dell'arte (10/12/1936, MC/S1/7/A). This interpersonal network of collaborators, who were also friends, can perhaps be better recognised in a Feminist form of Her-story as Historiography (Scott 1999, p.20) although in this case Chekhov is a man operating in a more 'feminine' style and within relationships which are traditionally applied only to women.

Daboo's (2012) useful analysis of the Studio also considers the cross fertilisation that occurred with the other artists that were also living and working in the Dartington Hall community at that time. She notes that other artists working there taught Chekhov's students, including Ullman, who had trained

with Laban and worked with Jooss, who taught Chekhov's students dance (see Chamberlain 2004, p.63 for similarities between aspects of Chekhov and Laban's work). The painter Tobey also had involvement with the students, but he did not teach them to paint, or to sculpt with clay per se, but rather as Daboo explains, 'Chekhov was using these different art forms to help students use their whole body and mind in a creative activity' (2012, p.70). She notes that the Indian dancer and choreographer, Shankar, gave a performance at the opening of the Studio that was greatly admired by Chekhov. This adds an even broader spectrum of cross-fertilisation and at least observation of, if not an element of borrowing from, others' practices and ideas. In America the Studio's financial position changed and there was certainly a pressure to create professional productions (see Black 1987). This was clearly problematic on some levels and Chamberlain (2004) argues contradictory at times, however, it did lead to the Chekhov's Theatre Studio's radical production of *The Possessed* (based on Dostoyevsky's novel *Demon*) in 1939.

### **3. Pedagogues Enabling Extended Play**

The play based pedagogy developed by Bing and Chekhov built on the idea of collaborative ensemble practice and enabled their pupils to develop work independently from them in student-led groups. Whilst the 'enabling' of this experiential and self-directed use of extended play required them to relinquish a level of control of their students' work this was finely balanced with supervision and mentoring of the young artists. This included teaching the various methods of play that were to be used, and providing a frame for the extended play. They also used detailed observation of, and reflection on, their students work and gave feedback on the developing work. In this model the level of autonomy that the students were given meant that they were able to learn through doing, playful experimentation and even 'failing'. It is also evident that Bing and Chekhov also learnt and further developed their practice through their student-collaborators' experiments.

Central to this was the system of student-monitors and group-leaders that Bing introduced at the Paris school, which was maintained after 1924 and was used for their research work. Like Montessori and Naumburg, she encouraged the students to take responsibility for their own learning. Dasté played a very significant role as student monitor and group leader in all the schools/ companies and Baldwin explains that it was she who had urged that 'they began developing their exercises into scenarios' (2003, p.28) at the school. This was, of course, the establishment of extended play. Jean Dasté and Dorcy were also to take on the roles of student-monitors teaching the other students and made very important contributions to the development of embodied, and extended play. In addition to giving certain students the responsibility of leading the learning/making activities at various times this process meant that the students' research, training and practice fed back into the overall methods of play, and Bing's practice. Importantly she had taught these methods within a culture and principle of creative play as Jean Dasté's comments affirm:

[...] when there was no teaching in the afternoon 'we were free to invent. Maïène [Marie-Hélène] encouraged us. Like her Dad she was imbued with the need to discover through playing together in modes of expression other than naturalism [...] The *raison d'être* of this group younger than 20 years old was in the spirit of Copeau to make us rediscover spontaneity, imagination, the freedom of infants when they play together.

(Dasté in Copeau/Sicard 2000, p.16)

He also explains: 'We really had the impression that when we did our improvisational and mask research that we were in the same state as children playing cowboys and Indians or cops and robbers, but obviously in a professional way' (Dasté in Baldwin 2003, p.21). This way of working will have given the students a sense of freedom (but also the chance to learn self discipline) and a level of self-determination as artists. Again this mirrors the philosophy of both Montessori and Naumburg. Baldwin notes that periodically Copeau viewed their students 'works-in-progress which he found fresh and exciting' (ibid) and gave feedback on the projects, but it is likely that Bing fulfilled this role much more frequently as Copeau was not often at the school

(see Kusler 1979). Bing also introduced a number of tools to facilitate this process. This included the student log, the 'Book', which reflected on their daily activities: 'That each one, once evening came, must write – at the same time an assessment of the day and a bit of a conscience examination' (Sicard/Copeau 2000 p.21). The students were also encouraged to discuss their projects and give feedback on each other's work (Kusler 1979, p.36) meaning that Bing was asking them to work with a level of self-reflexivity as artists. Sicard also notes that in 1923 when Bing and Dasté worked together on the reorganisation of the school and they made the tutorials, which had existed from the start of the Paris school, more systematic and the responsibility of the teachers, and this would undoubtedly have supported this style of training and mentoring.

Following the move to Burgundy in 1924, the group of students and artists continued training and researching in order to develop their New Comedy. Records (Kusler 1979) indicate that it was Bing, once again, who again was responsible for the training and she was helped by Dasté, Jean Dasté, Dorcy, and later on by Saint-Denis and Villard who taught singing. They continued and developed these autonomous and self-led systems of practical research and performance making, and the roles that some of them had undertaken as student-monitors and group-leaders in Paris will have prepared them to take this work even further. In many respects this was a natural development of Bing's overall pedagogic approach. However, aspects of their mask research become more individualistic in contrast to the more ensemble practice that had been employed in Paris. The women reportedly had less progress with their work but it is also possible that they were disadvantaged on a number of levels in this working pattern, in particular as a single mother, in Bing's case. Significantly they also continued to blend play in their everyday lives with their training as Bing had supported in Paris. As Kusler notes, 'their lives were to be dedicated to theatre through playing – celebrating birthdays, homecomings, church holidays, and wine festivals with improvisation, song, dancing, games, and the presentation of new works' (Kusler 1979, p.51). However, despite Copeau's intermittent involvement and frequent absence after

1924, the community was still dominated by his personal ideas and his preoccupation with his own spiritual journey at that time (see Rudlin 1986). Baldwin explains that despite Bing's central position in the school/company, she, Boverio, Villard and Vivert (the other three VC actors) were all expected to assume a 'student role, researching new dramatic forms through practice' (2003, p.26). Whilst this was a sound premise in the context of Bing's style of collaborative play-enabling and making, it is telling that Baldwin also reports that the *Patron* excluded himself from taking on this 'student' role. This obviously re-affirmed his very hierarchical view of the company and the idea that he was not open to learning. Baldwin also points out that the rules for the community introduced by Copeau were particularly restrictive for the younger women: '[...] Girls had additional rules: cafes were off-limits without special authorization, smoking and drinking prohibited' (2003, p.28). However, within this complex, at times patriarchal, and on occasion contradictory context, Bing and her collaborators were able to successfully continue and further develop forms of extended embodied play.

The pedagogic system and tools that Chekhov evolved at his later Studio were similar in some respects to those introduced by Bing and her collaborators, but there a number of significant points of divergence. There is parallel in the way in which Chekhov trained Straight and du Prey as teachers of Chekhov technique so that they could assist him in the running, and development, of the Studio. To do this he designed a specific series of lessons for them, rather than simply teaching them ad hoc in situ (see LTT, April-June 1936 MC/S1/7), although it is evident that their training continued during the lifespan of the Studio. Like Bing and Copeau he also encouraged students to carry out independent learning which required the application of his different methods embodied play in appropriately flexible and imaginative frames. These projects were similarly based on collaborative ensemble practice. Whilst he did not appoint Student Monitors in relation to training, or group leaders, he did appoint certain students (often his trainee teachers) to act as directors/assistant-directors to act as catalysts to the process. He also



appointed students as writers in these collaborative companies, some of whom were training as actors (Hatfield). The records kept by du Prey, and other archival materials, show how Chekhov set the students very specific tasks, sometimes led by du Prey, Straight or other students, where they worked independently on material. Whilst not always completely devised, the remits were fairly open because they were able to explore the projects through an application of the methods of play which created a space for their own invention and creativity, and because the frames they were to work within/create were often very flexible. Chekhov also asked his students to keep notebooks for written reflection on their work and du Prey's shorthand records of the classes also evidence extensive use of discussion with, and between, his students on the methods and projects that they are working on. The changes in the order of the course delivery for new students in the second year of the studio also exemplifies how Chekhov reflected on his own practice and pedagogic approach as he came to introduce this new intake to 'improvisation' at the start of their training.

In order to set up, and mentor, successful student-led projects based on their methods of embodied play Bing and Chekhov needed to select appropriate frames. They both taught the students how to work with some of these types of frame within a class context before enabling them to work more autonomously. They clearly sought 'open', flexible and imaginative materials for these projects and/or, in the case of Chekhov, give the students the leeway to be radical in their application of embodied play in relation to existing play texts.

#### **4. Extending Play Through Fantastical Frames**

##### **4.1 Fairytales, Folktales and Myths as Frames for Fantastic Extended Play**

Bing, Chekhov and their close collaborators drew on fairytales, folktales, fables and myths as flexible and fantastical frames for their student's extended play. Bing and Copeau had used Fontaine's fable of the *Cat and the Old Rat*

when working with the children in their early experiments with play. As discussed in Chapter 4, Naumburg also noted how the children's animal play developed into performances of animal fables in her school in New York (Naumburg 1928, p.302), and this would have given Bing further exposure to the interrelation between these activities. Consequently, by the time Bing initiated the first training programme in Paris (1920) these types of stories were being used to teach, and then to extend, the various methods of embodied play. Kusler notes in 1921-1922 'exercises were pulled together and related to their Greek studies' (1979, p.32) and explains: 'they developed improvisation games using myths, drawing names of myths and miming them out for others to guess. For their end-of-year program they did an original play on the myth of *Psyche*, composed, acted, danced, and sung by the group' (Kusler 1979, p.32). In the 1922-1923 cycle the students' main project, designed to integrate the various strands of their training, involved the creation of performances based on a fairy story, *Sleeping Beauty*, an old French folk tale, and also a modern piece called *Chant du Jeudi* which Kusler explains included 'many story book characters' (1979, p.37). The following description is also helpful in this context:

Both projects incorporated the concepts becoming basic to the school doctrine: stylized movement (study of a pantomime), masks, and rhythmic composition – including music and dance, improvisation, type characters, the personification of elements in nature, elements of French tradition, and myth. The first scene in "Sleeping Beauty", for example, was an improvisation in dynamics of movement and sound as the palace guards, cooks, ladies, and gentlemen fell asleep.

(Kusler 1979, p.37)

Extended play within these types of story frame was to become a feature not only of the schools but also the later work of LC and CQ.

Whilst still working in Russia with his first Studio (1918-1922), Chekhov had experimented with staging productions of fairytales and literary adaptations with his students, but as Gordon (1987) noted this work only attracted a limited audience and Chekhov was to return to acting. Later, Chekhov and Boner, in their production of *The Castle Awakens* (1931), had explored and adapted

Tolstoy's fairytale which had, in turn, been based on Russian folktales. Chekhov had hastily attempted to experiment with ideas partly inspired by Steiner's Eurhythmies in this production, which contained very little spoken text and a symbolist design, and whilst this was reported to be a flawed production it is evident that they were experimenting with a free and playful use of fairytale/folktale, rather than deciding to work on an existing play-script. Part of Act III is described as working as three central 'pictures' (1995, p.118) and it is significant that they were working with character types (such as Witches who carry out a circle dance) in this production, along with a fantastic use of objects, such as flying on a magic carpet and the replacement of the actor playing Ivan with a puppet-doll who is destroyed (ibid, p.117). They were also attempting to explore physical, spatial and therefore visual modes of communication (what Gordon describes as an attempt at a 'universal' theatrical language 1995, p.111, but what others might describe as non-text based) as the primary modes of signification. The public reception of this project was not positive (see Gordon 1995) and the show closed after very few performances. However, this represents the start of a longer term experiment with these types of story frames and whilst at Dartington Hall, Chekhov and his collaborators carried out extensive cross-cultural research into fairytales, folktales, myths and legends and constructed thematic systems for classification. For example under 'Abducting' the list includes 'Tsar Saltan; Ramayana; The Mahabharata; The Bamboo Cutter And The Moon Maiden; Tonetto Busetto' (MC/S5/1). They also founded the Fairy Tale Theatre Company (1937-1938) with the intention of developing performances for children. This work was continued after the studio moved to North America and was to form a significant aspect of his actor training. The research group produced various classifications of these stories, some specifically 'for Theatrical Purposes' (see Appendix VII).

On an obvious level these stories can be seen to relate to children's play and can be seen to correlate to their interest in the qualities they associate with the metaphorical notion of child-like naïveté. Indeed, both Naumburg and Steiner were to place these stories at the centre of their play-based pedagogies

in this respect. Steiner's Waldorf curriculum used them as a key learning tool prior to teaching children to read and write. However, as Naumburg argued 'fairy-tales and make-believe are an important part of a child's world as well as grown-ups' (Naumburg 1928, p.89) and Churchwell explains that they 'were originally adult entertainment, old wives amusing each other with tales' (15/10/2009, p.34) but notes that by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries fairytales had become 'sophisticated, ribald performances in the courts of Europe' (ibid). Many of these stories, originally intended for adults, are dark and disturbing. Lurie notes the oral and gendered history of fairytales which is interesting in relation to play practices: 'The storytellers that the Brothers Grimm and other folklorists collected their material from were almost always women. For hundreds of years, while men were writing books and preaching sermons, women were creating a parallel oral tradition' (14/10/2009, p.34). Although there are differences between them, fairytales, folktales and myths share key features that make them particularly suited for the use of extended play: they are all dramatic stories rather than prescriptive play-scripts; and frequently they exist in multiple versions, written or told by different authors, meaning there is an inherent flexibility in the telling of the story itself. When Bing and Chekhov used these stories they were working with, what is often a previously known, story or narrative, but there was no requirement for them (or their students) to slavishly follow a pre-existing scripted plot, rigid character descriptions, stage directions or scripted dialogue. Therefore these types of narrative allow for, and arguably require, a level of creative embodied play for the actors to 'discover' and 'invent' an embodied representation.

In one of Chekhov's classes, following Boner's lecture on *commedia dell'arte*, he focussed on the students' work on *The Golden Steed* and Chekhov explains '[t]he dimensions of a fairy tale are bigger than the dimensions of an ordinary play' (10/12/1936, MC/S1/7/A). This notion of an extended dimension, or scale, in relation to these non-Naturalistic stories is also highly relevant here, it can also apply to aspects of *Commedia dell'arte*. There is a different type of stylistic, imaginative, fantastic and physically expressive freedom for embodied

play in this 'larger' dimension. The following year Chekhov explains to his students, who are working on a Fairytale (*The Two Kings*), what these stories require in stylistic and psychological /ego terms. He comments: '[t]his play is very good propaganda against naturalism. In the majority of cases we could very clearly see that these were not the feeling of the actors' (27/09/1937, MC/S1/8/A). Not only do these stories actively challenge Naturalistic acting but they force the actors to engage with types of character or representation that is markedly different to them; their own subjective/personal psychology and memories. This notion of actors not basing character transformation on their own 'narrow' egos matches Chekhov and Bing's various forms of embodied play; these story-play-frames require this type of approach to embodied acting in quite explicit terms. However, this does not mean that the work is not imaginatively justified by the actors. When giving feedback to his students on their work ('Criticism: The Fairy Tale') he explains: 'This is a great achievement – a real demonstration for the feeling of truth. Here we have a fairy tale without any naturalistic approach – without any reason – and yet it is absolutely believable. The whole play is one big archetypal performance' (01/06/1937, MC/S1/7/B). What Chekhov is articulating here is how these performances are not naturalistic and do not necessarily follow rational and intellectual reason/logic, and yet actors can achieve what he defines as a feeling of truth through psychophysical practice that is imaginatively justified (in a manner similar to Vakhtangov Fantastic Realism). Warner's argument supports this position: '[The fairytale's] magic will vanish with too much rationalisation' (16/10/2009, pp.33-34), but a use of Chekhov and Bing's more spontaneous, less intellectual and rational forms of embodied play can help to retain this fantastical 'magic' whilst also developing what Chekhov (and Bing who also required students to justify their performances) defines as 'truthful' performance. Provocatively, Chekhov argues in the 1942 version of *To The Actor* that '[t]he best material for developing a good sense of artistic truth is offered in real folk-fairytales. They depict destinies, suffering, heroism, downfalls, growth and development, mistakes, inner defeats and final victories of individuals and the whole human race. They are true psychology, true history, and they prophesy

in tragic and humorous pictures' (MC/S5/4). The fact that fairytales can contain both tragic and comic elements (01/06/1937, MC/S1/7/B), was something that Chekhov (2004) felt was very important in general terms in relation to acting and this interest in both facets of performance was certainly shared by Bing and Copeau (see the repertoire of all three companies). His description of the context of these stories also seems to parallel what Lecoq terms Grand Emotion in relation to Melodrama: 'In melodrama all the grand emotions come into play: good and evil, morality and innocence, sacrifice, treason, etc. The objective is to achieve a performance which is powerful enough to move spectators to tears by giving vent to these grand emotions' (Lecoq 2000, p.105). Lecoq, like Chekhov and Bing needs the students to 'believe completely' in what they are performing and explains that melodrama does not refer to a style of acting consisting of clichés, 'but rather discovering and throwing light on very specific aspects of human nature' (ibid, p.107).

The archetypal aspect, particularly in relation to psychology, of these stories appealed to Chekhov and can be seen as connected to interest in Steiner's religious philosophy. He argues: 'We may say that this child's psychology is the psychology of the archetype, which grown up people lose. Children start with archetypal psychology and gradually lose it under the influence of grownups. Therefore, the more archetypal the approach to the fairy tale it is, the better' (21/02/1938, MC/S5/4). He argues that 'Fairytales have their "logic" because they arise from the time when the wisdom on humanity was symbolized in the images which we find in fairytales. They are not arbitrary because they were seen by the ancients as the outer experiences of inner truth and wisdom' (1942 version of TTA, MC/S5/4). However, for Chekhov this archetypal quality was also seen to be culturally and historically specific and he quotes Rudolf Meyer in this class in this respect, "The fairy tale and its ancient motif comes through the rise and fall of people, and through the rise and fall of different world-outlooks"(ibid). Regardless of whether or not you view these stories in these archetypal terms, or from the perspective of structuralism, it is clear that playing in this type of frame frees the actor from the ordinary and

enables an imaginative engagement of the extra-ordinary, but in justified terms. In addition, Govan et al (2007, p.89-90) point out that when contemporary devising companies still opt to work with known texts (including fairytales, see the work of Kneehigh in this respect) there is a commonality that is established between the ensemble and the audience. The images, events and types of character are also very distinct and have an emotional impact.

Chekhov's careful analysis of the elements they had found in the stories from different parts of the world in terms of themes, but also phenomena, events and types of character or representations is useful here. One document includes 50 categories; the following selection is particularly relevant to the methods of embodied play: '(13) Tiny people [...] (14) Elemental beings: i.e. Water, Earth, Air, Fire (15) Animals and birds, fish, etc. (16) Plants, flowers and trees (17) Elements: Earth, Air, Fire and Water (23) Transformations [...] (40) Half-humans, i.e. centaurs, mermaids, etc' (Chekhov et al, MC/S5/1). The folklore classification of 'Abnormal Phenomena' includes: 'Elements, animals and things which speak or sing or are in any way human' (MC/S5/1). This personification of the non-human, animal, elemental and 'abnormal' arguably allows actors to freely play with the fantastical, magical, non-naturalistic, non-human, animistic, and often non-realistic, character-types or beings in a way that Naumburg, Bing and Steiner had also noticed in children's play. This directly relates to the notion of transformational character play that both artists were exploring and these story-frames enable adult actors to play with embodied representations that have grotesque, magical, fantasy qualities and do not follow rational positivist logic. For example, Chekhov's exercise (No 8) centres on transformation in relation to fairytale elements and includes a princess turning into a spider (1991, p.12). These identified elements clearly correlates to the work that Bing carried out with animals, elements (for example wind, rain, trees, clouds and other natural phenomena see Kurtz cited in Felner 1985, p.63), rhythm and expressive movement and also to Chekhov's work with the movement qualities of Moulding, Flowing, Flying and Radiating (which can be linked to the elements), Imaginary Centres, Transformation and what he has defined as this sub-human and more animistic dimension of Clowning. These

types of play frame can be taken in different directions when working with adult actors, in relation to character (both internally/externally), environment, dynamics, use of space and atmosphere. Not just non-naturalistic, but anti-naturalistic in Chekhov's terms, the play that this fantastic frame allows for has extended dimensions, fantastical and transformational qualities, grand emotions, at times the grotesque, visceral, non-rational, demands stylistic invention. In addition to this, Byatt recognises the significance of objects in fairytales (12/10/2009, p.34), as did Chekhov and his co-researchers who noted symbols and magical objects, for example wands, swords, slippers, rings, apples, paths, etc, (MC/S5/1). This can be seen to clearly correlate with both Bing and Chekhov's interest in embodied play methods that draw on either real, visualised, and/or embodied objects and images. Govan et al argue that when contemporary devising practitioners opt to work with known stories (e.g. fairytales) they are often 'interested in changing the status of the original artefact. In transferring this work from the written page to the stage the function that it served is often re-examined, challenged or deliberately altered' (2007, p.90). This can also be seen to apply to the work with these frames for extended play developed by Bing and Chekhov early in the twentieth century; there was a radicalism found in this practice of play itself and the scope it gives for creative interpretation, although their intentions were clearly different to contemporary practitioners.

Interestingly, Chekhov and his close collaborators at the Studio also experimented with writing/creating their own fairytales. Chekhov worked with Morgan on a *Fairy Tale* whilst at Dartington and with Hatfield on *The Mother* (based on a theme by Hans Christian Anderson and designed to be performed for children) in Ridgefield in 1940 (see Appendix X). Chekhov's description of their intended approach to work on *The Mother* is revealing in this context as it highlights the collaborative nature of the making-process: 'The work on this Fairy Tale will be a little bit different from the work on other plays. We will elaborate it together – as a group we must create it as a performance' (31/01/1940, MC/ S5/4). This collective creation of a flexible frame for extended



play was radical in the way in which it situated the writer as part of a larger ensemble, rather than an 'isolated' artist, and as Chamberlain argues this can be seen as an early model of devised writing-creation (2004). It is also radical in relation to the use of embodied play which is given a higher status in this type of making-process that allows for extended play. The first version of *The Fairy Tale* starts with a description of the Atmosphere in General, a 'tall forest planed by gods', described as: 'Silent and vast. Each tree individual yet all being one complete whole. Any element here is free to wander and possess the forest completely. Storm is storm. Wind is wind. Rain is rain. Sun is sun. The carpet of the forest is ages deep with red-brown needles. Deep below roots explore twisted subterranean caverns' (MC/S5/4). This indicates a level of embodied play with the personification, or exploration, of the different elements and the trees themselves. The second version is different, but what is of interest is that these texts are written as scenario outlines, not as prescribed scripts and that they are full of giants, spirits, dancers, birds, sea monsters and other fantastic and non-human and non-naturalistic characters. Interestingly, *The Mother* contains characters that are similar to those found in Medieval plays (the characters include: Mother; Death; Night; Dawn; and Old Woman MC/S5/4). In contrast this play does have scripted dialogue and the tone is familiar to a Medieval Mystery, or a symbolist play (like Maeterlinck's work) or poetic play narratives (like Lorca's plays). One of Night's speeches provides an exemplar: 'I am the night. Death has been in your room. I saw him with my hundred eyes. I saw him walking through the snow, carrying the child away, bearing it deep into the wood. I know his coming and going. I know. I am the night' (MC/S5/4). Bing's first programme in the Paris school (1920) had also included the study of a medieval play (*Le Vrai Mystere de la passion*) and Kusler (1979) notes that this also provided a way of introducing the students to the chorus, which was to become key in her form of relational play. The correlation between aspects of Medieval theatre and Bing et al's form of extended embodied play also evolves into the professional work of the later companies.

## 4.2 Character Type and Mask as Catalysts for Extended Play

The forms of extended play developed by Bing and Chekhov facilitated through the use of fairytales, folktales and myths involved a use and exploration of character types which provides a particular freedom to the actor as there are no pre-existing scripted definitions of characters that they are required to follow. These general character types are explored through the methods of embodied play, such as Chekhov's Imaginary Body and Imaginary Centre or Bing's work on animals, objects, rhythms or masks and whilst it starts in a very simple manner it can lead to complex characterisation. This warrants further consideration in broader terms. Children play with broader and freer types of mimesis, or characterization, and develop these types through the process of embodied play rather than attempting to start with a complex character from the outset, which is something that younger children are not necessarily able to achieve, or want to do. In other words this provides a basic rule but one which allows for creative interpretation through embodied play. Copeau had identified this quality in the children's play at Naumburg's school and she reflects on how their exchange provided a theatrical vocabulary to articulate her work: 'It was only later, when Jacques Copeau, delighted with these children's improvisations, first compared it to the methods of *commedia dell'arte*, that I began to see that I had rediscovered, in a crude and fumbling way, those fundamentals of dramatic art' (Naumburg 1928, p.304-305). Rudlin and Paul differently interpret this exchange and argues that 'later [Naumburg] wrote to Copeau that it was thanks to him she had discovered the importance of improvisation in children's games and had incorporated it in her curriculum' (1990, p256). In the light of the previous analysis of Naumburg's approach, and the nature of children's play itself, this suggestion seems unlikely but it is telling in relation in its aim to locate an ownership on this type of practice, rather than seeing that Copeau may have given her a language to articulate something that was already taking place to some extent in her practice with children. Indeed Copeau had already witnessed in 1916 the way in which certain forms of children's play engages with improvisation and the creation of types with a

'notion of simplicity, rusticity and almost crudeness' (Copeau 1990, p.156). This work with character type also relates to the work that both Bing and Chekhov undertook with mask (in addition to Chekhov's play with imaginative masks as previously discussed). Whilst Bing was to start to work extensively with mask in later years, Chekhov's use was less consistent, but still significant in this context (MC/S1/7/B). This correlation between mask and type along with the way in which they 'lead' the form of embodied play gives them the impact to operate as catalysts for extended play in very simple frames or scenarios.

We therefore need to pause to deconstruct what we mean by embodied character types in relation not only to these types of stories, but also mask work, basic scenarios and forms such as the Medieval Mystery Plays or Commedia dell'arte, and how they come from, and in turn create, forms of embodied play. Barker discusses this issue in relation to what he defines as prototype, and the capacity for empathy, in children's play and our general learning process in life. He argues that children's 'playing gains sophistication as they gain more observed information and then test it in imaginary practice' (Barker 1977, p.118). Barker argues that prototype is not the same as cliché '[i]t is important to make a distinction...between cliché and prototype. The nature of the cliché is that it is already total, and consciously defined before one employs it. A prototype is a structure based upon limited knowledge from which further investigation and development can take place' (ibid). However, Chekhov explains we must not censor ourselves out of an intellectual snobbery: '[w]e must not be afraid of the cliché, because cliché has form and without form we cannot express ourselves [...] but [cliché] must be filled with life' (Chekhov and du Prey, *The Actor is the Theatre*, June 23, 1937) (cited in Aspherger 2008, p.88). It would seem that Chekhov's notion of filling a cliché with 'life' is actually similar to Barker's idea that prototype which is not fully defined and becomes developed through further imaginative play and observation. Therefore Bing and Chekhov's adult actors were attempting to be open and spontaneous enough to find these broader and simpler types in the first instance. To do this they needed to be less constricted by ideas of sophistication and complexity

and it was the various forms of embodied play that enabled them to bypass what Chekhov defines as 'dry thinking' at the start, in order to discover this basic yet often freer imaginative type which is then filled with 'life'.

However, whilst the development of these types into something more 'sophisticated' is appropriate for some styles of performance, we need to remember that this is not always wanted, or needed, in other modes of performance. Chekhov himself noted that the decision to use different forms of embodied characterization (from broader type, to stylized presentation, to psychologically complex) is related to the question of aesthetics and style in performance. Chekhov and Bing were intentionally not working with naturalism when playing with these known stories and these character types often operate in a more physically expressive manner. The physical scale, the 'largeness' that Chekhov discusses and the 'stylization' that has been noted in Bing's work with her students, of the movement and qualities of physical and imaginative expression can therefore be more freely explored. This shares an affinity with *Commedia dell'arte*, Medieval theatre, mask work and clowning all of which were used in both Bing and Chekhov's forms of play.

The VC company was also using these types in their Molière productions and concurrently the school was using them in combination with extended embodied play. At the school Bing was leading, what Kusler defines as advanced improvisational exercises, but I am describing as frames for extending embodied play, with character types. Kusler notes this worked helped them to develop characters 'suggestive of Copeau's [sic] New Comedy' (1979, p.31). She explains how they used characters from Molière or 'familiar novels' and developed character and material through stages of play: (i) first they found the character's silhouette or characteristic posture (which is similar to Chekhov); (ii) starting from stillness they gradually find movement; (iii) they then find traits or mannerisms through working with isolations; (iv) they then exaggerate and add to these traits to develop lazzi, or comic actions (ibid). Whilst Kusler does not state this, there must also have been an exploration of

these characters in relation to each other and also space, at some point in the process. She explains that '[p]antomime, rhythm, and simple sound and verbal exercises helped to develop these characters. Starting with basic rhythms in walk and gesture, the students pantomimed their characters doing everyday things' (p.31). They then progressed to finding (i.e. playing to find) 'simple characteristic verbal phrases for the characters' and engaged in spoken improvisations' (ibid). They were to use these techniques extensively in their later attempt to develop a 'New Comedy' after 1924. As Evans notes (2006, p.103) working with character type is often seen as 'unsophisticated' and therefore undesirable through a matrix dominated by social realism in the theatre and self-based psychological realistic acting techniques and we need to be cautious of these prejudices. It is also evident that these character types, like masks, can easily become catalysts for extended play by being placed in simple scenarios and through an idea of their psychophysical form and this is a feature that does not always apply to other acting approaches to character.

Chekhov's use of the term archetype in relation to characterisation warrants discussion at this point. He certainly perceives it as something that can be seen as a type of primary model or prototype for the character (and their main desires/psychological gestures) and he argues: 'There is another thing in our actor's nature which might be called archetype. [...] For instance, there are different lions running around in the desert – each is a lion, one bigger, one smaller, but there is a lion as an archetype. There is an idea of a lion, which is the source of all lions. Call it what you want, but we must first create it' (1985, p.112). Chekhov argues that to get to 'individual and unique character you have to go through the archetype' (1985, p.114). Whilst this term could be seen as problematic if it is understood in strict Jungian terms, i.e. is something universally inherited that comes from the collective (Eurocentric notion of) unconsciousness, Chekhov is actually much more sophisticated in his use of this term. Indeed, Chekhov's writings (and own nomadic life experience) certainly seems to recognise that this may be something culturally and historically specific (Chekhov 1985, p.26). Chekhov expressed doubts about

whether the term archetype best expressed his ideas about this element of character (Colvin cited in Aspherger 2008, p.244) and he therefore suggests we name it our own way. Crucially this idea of archetypal character correlates to his ideas about archetypal, and psychological, gesture (opening, closing, pushing, pressing etc) and how this can trigger the actor's embodied imagination in strong psychophysical terms. In some senses this does depend on the notion of certain core movements that are shared between cultures. This is of particular interest to this type of play with character type as Bing, Dasté and Dorcy in particular were drawing on Hebert's gymnastics which shared a focus on very similar core, or archetypal, movements and they too built their methods of play on the imaginative and psychophysical strength of this movement work. Crucially, Chekhov's idea of archetypal gesture, or finding the 'essence' of something can also relate to non-human forms, taking us back to the list of elements, nature and forms in fairy-folktales and myths. This is also evident in forms of embodied play developed by Bing and her collaborators (see Kusler 1979). Chekhov also uses the term archetypal in relation to a kind of absorption and distillation of the actor's personal experience, which also becomes something more stripped down, more basic, more a 'type' of feeling, that is accessed indirectly through is various forms of play. Whilst not exactly the same as Bing et al this notion of feeling being accessed through character type and core movement also features in their form of embodied play. The term is therefore perhaps best viewed as a loose metaphor. However, this idea certainly indicates something that starts more simply with a 'clear form' but the openness that allows it to evolve rather than actors seeking to start with some notion of intellectual or emotional 'sophistication'.

Significantly, Donahue notes that Bing and Dasté had a keen interest in design and strong visual sense which underpinned their early experiments with masks, and mask-making in the United States. I would also argue that this closely correlates to Bing's work with character types, and the fantastical, in a broader sense in embodied and extended play and suggests an interesting parallel to Chekhov's interest in visual image, visualisation and the caricatures

he drew of characters. Donahue explains about this important phase of Bing and Dasté's work that sadly '[w]e know little about the results of their experiment' (Donahue 1998, p.119). However, this work coincided with Bing's experiments with embodied play including animal work, character types and extended play through frames such as animal fables at Naumburg's school. Concurrently, Bing and her collaborators in the VC Company were staging various Moliere productions in New York and therefore working with character type. This nexus point of emergence seems highly relevant to the work on embodied play in relation to character type, mask, animal play, and the use of fantastical frames to extend this play. Indeed, forms of embodied play with both character and noble masks, was introduced to the students at the schools in Paris and Burgundy building on these experiments (Appendix VI). Bing, Copeau and their close collaborators were to use the noble mask as a tool to explore and extend embodied play in relation to allegorical mime exercises, animal work, work with the elements and nature, gymnastics, dance, rhythm, music, etc. This was combined and extended by Bing, which the work of the chorus of the little demons and their non-human (and animistic) movement and mask play, demonstrates clearly (Kusler 1979, p.31) as it was used directly in the company production of *Saul*. In the work of the later companies this type of extended embodied play continues and includes working with four basic types of mask.

## **5. Extending Play in Basic Frames**

Bing and Chekhov also used various other simple scenarios in the same manner as the fairytales in their actor training practices. Generally these frames were imposed externally, but at times they were generated internally, i.e. within the methods of embodied play itself. The simplicity of many of these frames recalls Jouvett's early suggestion to Copeau (Jouvett in Rudlin 1986, p.226-227) that actors work on the reduction of scenes (of play-scripts) to resumes or skeletal actions, and the use of their own words, in order to give them more creative space, for what I am terming embodied play. These frames

allow the methods of play to be developed and blended organically but are flexible enough to allow the physical expressivity of this practice equality with the frame, scenario/narrative, itself.

## **5.1 Sailors and Fishers**

Bing and Copeau's students worked on a simple story known as 'The Sailor'; the story of a shipwreck, communicated through the reactions of the townsfolk awaiting the return of sailors who have been caught in a storm. Bing enabled her students to explore this through a use of various methods of play (including mask play) previously taught.

[The group of masked students] must produce [...] a vision of a strand and of fisher-folk peering out upon a stormy sea. Their bodies create not alone their emotion, but by a subtle fugue the heave of the water. A rowboat comes up. It is created by two actors in a rhythmic unison of propulsion. They leave their boat and mount the stairs to the apron. They have news of the drowning of a comrade: the news transfigures the group. The scene shifts to what is an interior of a fisher cottage. The wife and children await the master. The friends come in with the tragic tidings.

(Frank 1925 cited in Kusler 1979, p.45)

In addition to exploring (playing) the reactions of the fisher folk as a masked chorus / character types, the atmosphere of the scene and the action of the story, it is significant that the students were also required to create the both the heave of the water (i.e. play with elements) and the rowboat's motion (i.e. rhythmic play). The story allows for an application of these methods, but takes them further as catalysts of performance material. Significantly, Chekhov used a similar story when working at Dartington, 'The Fisher's Scene' (Appendix XI) in which students are also asked to imagine being families in a fishing village waiting for the return of a group of fishermen who went to sea two days previously but have been caught in a storm and not returned:

[...] See the wives and children [...] looking at the horizon, listening to every sound which they try to catch from the stormy, windy weather [...] One of these figures is a very young girl [...] waiting for her bridegroom [...] There are many other figures – each enveloped



in this tragic atmosphere which is suspended like a heavy stone above them. [...] The watchers begin to see something on the horizon – perhaps some of the boats are coming back [...] Is it joy that the people feel? This changes because it can clearly be seen that only one boat is coming back [it] reaches the shore and only one fisherman steps out of the boat [...] he knows that all the other men are dead. Imagine his complicated state: bringing enormous joy to his wife and a tragic blow to everyone else [...] This is one big wave of tragedy.

(1937, MC/S1/21/E)

Both scenarios are reminiscent of narratives in Greek and other Myths but both are kept simple with no direct reference to any one existing play text. Chekhov's students, although unmasked, also explored this frame through imaginative embodied work based on his different 'grounds' of play. His telling of the story reflects his focus on working with tragic Objective Atmosphere, 'suspended like a heavy stone above them', and provides some more detail on certain characters. He does not specify how the actors create the boat but asks them to 'imagine' and embody it in their own terms; therefore students would have had physically expressive freedom in their interpretation in relation to the specified 'grounds' of play. Chekhov's scenario also features the figure of an 'old strange' woman who almost has 'second sight' and in many respects she could be a character type from a fairytale, folktale, or myth. Her inclusion introduces a less realistic and more fantastic element to this scenario.

Both these frames centre on relational play through the use of the chorus. Whilst the actors are embodying individual characters the emphasis is on play as chorus in relation to strong elemental forces and a tragic atmosphere, i.e. The Whole in Chekhov's terms. It is necessary to note that Lecoq was later to use very similar scenarios to train his actors in his form of Le Jeu and he relates this to what he defines as the expression of 'grand emotion' in melodrama, in which he argues there are two essential themes; 'The Return' and 'The Departure' (2000, p.105). These themes, and their related grand emotions, can be seen in a number of the other frames for extended play developed by Bing and Chekhov and this is perhaps something that is particularly helpful when developing non-Naturalistic embodied play in general.

## **5.2 Other Simple Frames for Extended Play**

Chekhov provided ten suggested scenarios for improvisation (2002) that vary in style and form, one of which is a variation of 'The Fisher's Scene'. Importantly he notes that not all of them are, or need to be, original and therefore he suggests that the group 'select material from any existing literature and adapt it to its specific needs' (2002, p.162). He goes further and suggests that they could even 'invent new ideas for improvisation' (ibid), i.e. they could devise their own frame to extend their embodied play. He advises actors 'avoid the use of unnecessary words' (ibid) in these scenarios, thereby giving sufficient space for this play to also operate in very embodied, spatial and atmospheric terms. Whilst these scenarios were not intended for public performance it is evident that working with them teaches actors to use and extend the methods of play, frees them from the use of play-scripts, trains them in the free adaptation of non-theatrical texts and empowers and enables them to freely invent or create basic devised performance.

## **5.3 Internally Generated Frames for Extended Play**

Importantly, Bing enabled her students to also work the other way around; i.e. to use embodied play to develop frames or scenarios from inside: 'Often no theme would be given and intuitive discoveries made through the initially abstract improvisation led to simple situations, such as that of village women in a wash-house gossiping whilst working' (Rudlin 2000, p.60). This is a different form of embodied story-telling and it centres on invention using the methods of play as a catalyst for the construction of the frame which in turn takes these methods of play further. Chekhov similarly designed play that also built its own 'frames' from within. Exercise 12 advises actors to 'decide which are the starting and concluding moments of your improvisation' which 'must be definite pieces of action' (2002, p.37). He explains that actors should 'not try to anticipate what you are going to do *between* the two chosen moments. Do not

try to find any logical justification or motivation for either the starting and concluding moments themselves. Choose them at random. Choose any two things that first pop into your head, and not because they will suggest or bracket a good improvisation. Just a contrasting beginning and end' (ibid). He notes that 'the middle part, the whole transition from starting to concluding points, is *what* you improvise' (ibid). Over time actors might also add further points and therefore the 'frame' becomes more complex. Whilst these forms of extended play trained actors in imaginative justification and spontaneity it also taught them practical and instinctive ways of creating scenarios or frames for extending their own play. Decroux's recollection of how they had to invent and perform small scenarios, within tight timeframes, at the French school is also helpful as he identifies the correlated skill this teaches actors: 'In a rapid consultation – three minutes at the most – the pupils made up a sketch which they performed on the spot. They alone knew what to expect or not to expect from this type of playing: they therefore had to be their own playwright (July, 1939). Therefore, it was the extension of the various methods of embodied play, in/through a variety of frames, which did indeed train both Bing and Chekhov's student-actors to be, if not playwrights in the traditional sense, the 'creators' of small-scale performance in their own rights; they were trained for what we now call devised theatre-making. Indeed Oddey's (1994) description of devised theatre can be applied to the forms of extended play that Bing and Chekhov developed in their training programmes, and eventually in professional productions much earlier in the twentieth-century. She describes devised theatre as being 'concerned with the collective creation of art (not the single vision of the playwright)' and that 'the emphasis has shifted from the writer to the creative artist' (p.4) and argues that this practice creates 'a freedom of possibilities for all those involved to discover; an emphasis on a way of working that supports intuition, spontaneity, and an accumulation of ideas' (p.1). This clearly correlates to these earlier forms of embodied and extended play. Whilst both Bing and Chekhov were often working with some type of text, or at times a writer, this does not preclude their practice from being defined as devised theatre in relation to much contemporary practice (see Heddon and Milling

2006, p.6) and Govan et al (2007) note that this area of work has no 'single aesthetic or ideological objective' (p.4).

#### **5.4 Bing: Taking Extended Play into Public Performance**

After the move to Burgundy we start to see a blurring between extended play being used to make performance in the training context and productions for public viewing. LC was meant to be a training-company. It is therefore helpful to consider four of the performances they developed after this move to analyse how they drew on, and extended, embodied play and how this fed back into their training. The company rehearsed, and for the first time, performed outdoors in the villages and small towns of rural Burgundy, and at local festivals, in line with their hope of creating a more popular form of theatre. Dasté and Jean Dasté, along with Saint-Denis and Villard also acted as fairground barkers working and drawing the crowds (Baldwin 2003, p.33) for their shows and this gave them the opportunity to more openly play with their audiences in the formal performance, but also before and afterwards outside the formal performance frame, as a travelling troupe of actors. The first pieces were performed in January 1925 and were 'written' for the company by Copeau. *L'Impôt* was adapted from writing by Pierre de L'Estoile 'concerning a poor man who tried to keep the king's adviser from drinking his beer by drinking it all himself' (Rudlin 1986, p.86), another simple story which is not dissimilar to the scenarios that Bing had been using at the school to extend play into small-scale performance. However, in contrast, *L'Object* used various methods of play, in different frames, to generate performance material. It was based on a very loose, what Kusler describes as 'non existent plot', concerning the search for an object (1979, p.51), which Rudlin notes 'turned out to be a jazz tune, to which the play ended in a dance' (1986, p.86), that held together various character sketches and lazzi. Rudlin explains that in the making process Copeau had the actors 'improvise' and that he watched the outcomes and he would 'then re-stage and shape the action and write down the dialogue' (1986, p.86). The basic use of observation of the material produced through an extended frame of

play, and then the application of compositional direction, is something that Bing was of course doing at the Paris school also and is very common in current devised processes. The centrality of an object mirrors the work that Bing had developed with objects over the previous years, and this was to continue to feature in their work, as does the playful use of music and 'dance'. Following these shows Copeau ended the first phase of their project (Feb 1925). Only eleven remained to form LC but they were to produce seven original pieces (1924-1929). Kusler notes, as 'Copeau planned to be away a great deal touring with dramatic readings and lectures to raise money, the troupe was to be under the direction of St. Denis' (1979, p.52). However, it was not to be this straightforward and after the company's work proved successful Copeau insisted on taking back the direction of the company.

It was Bing, Dasté, Jean Dasté, Saint-Denis, Villard and the rest of the company who were to collectively create the more successful original works, mostly through the use of extended play. *Les Cassis* (1925) was a short performance based on *Las Olivas* by Lope de Rued and dealt with 'the growing and harvesting of blackcurrants [an important crop in Burgundy], expressed in mime, song and dance. It had no plot and no dramatic conflict, but was simply a celebration such as the Copiaus enjoyed at home' (Kusler 1979, p.92). The simple frame for extended play is very reminiscent of those that Bing had been employing in the Paris school, and we start to see a blend between the forms of play that Bing had facilitated in company/school's general (personal) life and play for public performance; it also kept the frame simple and flexible. Despite the problematic relationship between Copeau and the rest of the company, and after a period of protracted absences, he wrote *L'illusion* (1926) which drew more explicitly on their masked-play research and their own lives as a theatre troupe. Copeau explains: '[t]his is not, properly speaking, either a drama or comedy. It is a theatre game' (Copeau 1990, p.170). He used a theme from Corneille's *L'illusion comique* which had in turn been adapted from Fernando de Rojas' Medieval play, which as previously noted, was another historical mode of performance they had explored in the school. He explains that after the troupe

had arrived, singing, and constructed the stage, 'the play, or rather they mystery, then took place with its masks, a little music, some ghosts, an old peasant, a witch, a princess, some murderers and some demons' (Copeau cited in Rudlin 1986, p.94). Again, we see the recognisable features of the earlier experiments with extended play. Kusler notes that the production used various presentational devices including prologue, direct address, stylized naturalism of mimed props, songs, dance, the use of masked stock characters along spoken dialogue (1979, p.64), all of which continued their work developed at the school under Bing's guidance. At this time the company was working with four basic types of mask: the first mask was noble (neutral); the second had 'a sense of terror, animality, the grotesque' (Kusler 1979, p.65); the third was a 'mask of fairy-tales, mask of poetry, mask of dream' worn by the Magician (ibid); and the fourth mask was a character mask of 'an old woman, a procuress and sorceress' that was worn by Bing (ibid). These masks often 'led' their extended play with little framing, just activity or context can be enough for such strong masks. They concurrently drew on Bing's play with objects as a catalyst for transformational and physical play with these mask/types. Saint-Denis's description of working with his masked character (Oscar Knie) with a stick and a rolled up piece of carpet demonstrates this: '[the objects] gave me an air of authority which I would not have had by using gesture of my hand alone. A prop is not just a prop, nor a stick a stick: they can become, somehow, extensions of the actor and the range of transformations they are capable of is almost inexhaustible' (Saint-Denis 1982, p. 177). The company aesthetic remained markedly physical and playful and they continued to use ensemble 'as a visual chorus to create moods, places, times, and events' (Kusler 1979, p.64) as they had at the earlier school.

*Danse de la ville et des champs* (1928) was developed from a short piece, *Le Printemps*, made the previous year. What is particularly significant is how this work had been developed from what is generally referred to as an 'exercise' (but I would argue the use of various methods of embodied play extended in suitable frames) exactly as they had worked in the Paris school.

Baldwin argues the 'deliberately naïve plot contrasted the values of town and country' (2003, p.36) and that by '[a]dapting sound-and-movement exercises, actors created the contrasting atmosphere of city and country: sun and wind, changing seasons, fields, storms, urban sights and noises' (Baldwin 2003, p.36). In other words the chosen frame enabled the company to fully explore the methods of embodied play (character type, elements, nature, etc) into performance. Aykroyd's comments reflect the highly embodied and playful performance style: 'I have a vivid recollection of how they presented machinery in mime to symbolize industrialism. Then the coming of the storm over the vegetation, the havoc wrought and the subsequent joy of life reviving were all beautifully symbolized in gesture and attitude' (1935, p.22). Baldwin notes that, as in previous shows they produced a dynamic soundscape in the 'context of a play by a troupe committed to creating meaning through movement and, to the greatest extent possible, sound without words' (2010, p.84). Predictably the piece is attributed to Saint-Denis and Villard, as the first wrote the minimal dialogue and the latter composed the music. Ironically in this context, Saint-Denis had neither been student/student-monitor or teaching staff at the Paris school where they had been developing these methods and frames of embodied play since 1913, and Villard had only undertaken some training in Division B of the school (not the apprentice group) whilst an actor with the VC company. The embodied play that Bing and her collaborators had been using/sharing to generate the performance material and the related aesthetic, the messy, non-textual, and less individualistic 'women's work', continued to be marginalised by the 'proper' work of the men which could be claimed and owned in traditional terms. Rudlin notes that '[f]or many of the company the performance was the apotheosis of the ideas it had been working on since the opening of the VC School in 1920' (1986, p.110). Significantly, Copeau had not been involved in the making of the piece and had in fact been asked not to attend rehearsals' (Baldwin 2003, p.36). His feedback on the work was vehemently negative as Villard explains: '[w]e were waiting for constructive criticism. Alas, it was a demolition job, total and complete. Copeau was ferocious. All our efforts, all our passions, all our joy – there was nothing left.

Nothing found favour in his eyes. His last word, full of a bitter derision worthy of Ecclesiastes was: dust' (Villard cited in Rudlin 1986, p.110). Rudlin argues that the 'new *commedia* project...had evolved empirically into a product that was, somehow, contrary to Copeau's vision' (1986, p.111). He goes on, problematically, to use Copeau's paternal language and metaphors in his own analysis: 'While the father was away, the children played with his tools and spoiled them by using them for a purpose for which they were never intended' (ibid). This clearly infantilises Bing, and dismisses the work that she had developed in the schools/companies; they were not, and never had been only the 'father's tools' and the question of how to use these 'tools' had been left to Bing for many years at the Paris school.

Evans claims that 'the search for a 'new comedy' had effectively passed into the hands of the next generation' (2006, p80) at this point and whilst this reflects the company's willingness to work very differently to Copeau it is problematic as Bing was not the same generation and had trained/mentored many of them. It could be argued that in fact Copeau was using a particular form of masculinity (and related metaphors and roles, i.e. the Father, the Patron) as a form of control in order to claim a type of 'ownership' of not just processes and practices, but also to some extent people. Various theatre historians have to some extent then continued this type of acceptance, or indeed valorisation, of these ideas. However, as has been demonstrated, this approach is the antithesis to the processes of play, and play-enabling, that they were working with. From a Feminist and Foucauldian perspective, this can be seen as one dominating discourse subsuming a more marginal, and 'feminine' practice that operates very differently. Bing was undoubtedly more able than Copeau to take these forms of extended and quietly radical embodied play and use them in more radical and collaborative forms of theatre; she was able to follow through the ethical proposition of play; that the outcomes cannot always be determined, controlled or even owned, by one individual.



LC created another piece without Copeau *Les Jeunes Genes et l'araignee* (1929), based on another scenario by Villard and Saint-Denis, and were rehearsing when Copeau dissolved the company (May 1919). Baldwin argues that:

Factionalism and power struggles, which were to prove destructive to the Compagnie des Quinze had their beginnings [in LC]. Marie-Hélène Copeau and her new husband Jean Dasté felt pressured by the older, more dominant Saint-Denis and Villard. Their interest in professionalizing the company seemed at odds with Copeau's vision. The Dastes believed that Saint-Denis and Villard were exploiting research material for their own ends.

(2003, p.38)

A re-evaluation of the theatre-making processes of LC certainly indicates that Saint-Denis and Villard were explicitly and extensively drawing on the forms of collaborative embodied play that had been developed over many years but, like Copeau, they wanted to claim a particular type of power and ownership. Saint-Denis was also tellingly described as 'often authoritarian' in his approach (ibid, p.1). Baldwin's interview with Dasté clarified Bing's perspective on the work of LC and CQ: 'According to Mme Daste, Suzanne Bing, having designed much of the school curriculum, resented Saint-Denis and Villard's appropriation of the exercises for productions' (2003, p.38). Sadly, Baldwin does not address this important issue in any real depth nor does she recognise that it was not just a question of using 'exercises' outside of a larger approach and philosophy. What this reveals is that these two men were explicitly drawing on the methods of play that Bing and her collaborators developed, and the research being carried out by the company at large, in what the Dasté's believed was an 'exploitative' manner. This 'appropriation' also frequently involved the use of small-scale performances that had already been started at the school and the associated aesthetic and blend of performance modes. Bing's contribution was clearly not valued or openly acknowledged. Bing's reported resentment also clearly contradicts the assumption made by many researchers (Donahue 2008, Frost & Yarrow 2007) that Bing was somehow responsible for, and passive about, her own marginalisation in the historical representation of the work of the various schools and companies. It is imperative that we centralise Bing's own

perspective and comments on these relationships and practices. The concerns about the unethical 'exploitative appropriation' of their practices, and indeed material, that were expressed by the Dastés and Bing also raise significant questions about power, ownership and control in relation to embodied play and collaborative / devised practices more generally. These issues can also be seen as something that remains in contemporary collaborative and devised practice and have not yet been fully debated.

## **6. Extended Play with Texts and Writers**

### **6.1 Compagnie des Quinze: 'Writing' Embodied Play**

A year after Copeau disbanded LC Saint-Denis reunited the artists to form CQ. It was a company of fifteen made up of ten company members including Bing and five students, led by Saint-Denis who Kurtz claims had been 'the school's most assertive personality' (Kurtz 1999, p.129). They produced six independent productions (1930-1934) 'which ranged across epochs and theatrical styles' (Baldwin 2010, p.84) and four other works in three seasons. Their practice has been well documented in relation to Saint-Denis's history, position and later work by Baldwin (2003, 2010) but sadly not in relation to Bing's contribution and the way in which the company drew on, and developed, the various forms of extended embodied play that she helped to establish at the various classes/schools prior to the Burgundy move. Curiously her position on Bing is contradictory as while she acknowledges that Villard's view tend to be particularly negative in general, she uses his comments as a definitive assessment of Bing's work, arguing that while her work as 'Copeau's trusted assistant' was '[c]ommitted, painstaking, and pedagogically inventive, she was nevertheless ill-suited to teach. Students found her too cold and stern' (2003, p.20). This is perhaps wilfully ignorant of Baldwin as she also acknowledges that Bing had concerns about the way in which Saint-Denis and Villard appropriated the methods that she and her collaborators had developed. In

addition, CQ was also to rely heavily on Bing as one of the most experienced and versatile actors/pedagogues/directors to make and perform their popular form of theatre; Ackroyd claimed that she was 'one of the most talented members' of the company (1935, p.15). The relationship between the new company and Copeau continued to be complex, but in terms of historical narrative it is Saint-Denis' accounts that tend to dominate our understanding of this last, and most radical phase, of experimentation with embodied play.

Their first productions, *Noé* (1931) and *Le Viol de Lucrece* (1931) which were shown together, and production of *La Bataille de la Marne* (1931) all very clearly demonstrate a radical application of the methods of play, and frames for extended play, in terms of the process of making and in the overall style of the performances and will therefore be considered in this context. A discussion of these projects also facilitates an analysis of how the company started to experiment with working with a writer, Andre Obey, in a collaborative ensemble and how he drew directly on, and to some extent 'wrote', embodied play. Prior to the dissolution of LC Saint-Denis had asked a writer C.F Ramuz (who significantly wrote folktales) to develop a script based on the bible story of *Noah* that he and Villard had suggested, but later the same year Ramuz withdrew from the project. As discussed previously Obey had written *Saul* (1922) for which Bing had directed the chorus of little demons using the context of the play as a frame for her extended play, he had also seen and admired *L'Illusion*. Consequently the writer was familiar with the play-based work that Bing was developing and became the catalyst for the two later companies. He agreed to work as a writer with CQ, who were now working completely independently from Copeau. *Noé* was the first play that Obey was to write with/for the company and it was based on the biblical story of Noah and inspired by Medieval Mystery plays. His arrival triggered a new way of working with a writer in a collaborative process of theatre-making that was still drawing extensively on methods of play. Saint-Denis describes the process between their ensemble 'devoted to physical expression which came to feel the need of an author' thus: 'With us, casting, staging and planning the sets and costumes were undertaken at the same time

as the writing of a play. It was essential that the author become a member of our ensemble and adhere to its orientation' (Saint-Denis 1982, p.33). Indeed, Rudlin notes that there was a very important difference between the way in which Obey was prepared, and able, to work with his collaborators and Copeau's approach. He argues that perhaps Copeau 'had not been sufficiently relaxed about his abilities as a writer to share the scripting process with them, in the rehearsal room Obey, on the other hand, was eager to accept the challenge and fully realized that his own work would be metamorphosed as a result' (Rudlin 1986, p.30). As this work was to be collaborative, Obey drew heavily on the practices, experiments and style of the CQ in his writing for the company. Like their previous frames for extended play, these plays 'were not based on plots evolved from the detailed psychology or character: they told stories in action, using narrative devices' (Saint-Denis 1982, p.42) and they continued to use the aesthetic and modes of performance that they had been developing for many years. Rudlin argues that 'rather than simply writing good parts for actors based on their improvisations, Obey was able to write to the stylistic strengths of a permanent company' (ibid, pp. 30-31). In fact, their style and mode/s of performance was closely correlated to their methods of play and to some extent it is clear that in the three selected plays Obey was to some extent 'writing' this embodied play. However, Baldwin points out that a level of adjustment was needed in the company as 'Obey was an outsider; most of the troupe had worked together as an ensemble for almost ten years' (2003, p.41). She also points out that Obey 'held an authoritative position in the company since, besides generating material, he brought a benefactress [...] Thanks to her generosity, an elaborate rehearsal studio was built to Saint-Denis's specifications' (2003, p.42).

Obey therefore wrote *Noé* (1929-1930) based on the company's work, their style and the centrality of certain forms of embodied play. Stylistically it contains symbolist elements and drew on devices from Medieval Mystery and Miracle plays along with a use of chorus and protagonists from Greek Tragedy, all of which had been used in the earlier experiments. Saint-Denis' description

makes the connection to the company's ongoing work with embodied play immediately apparent:

[...] the play makes use of two choruses: a chorus of children, and a chorus of animals [...] There is nothing complex about their individual psychology – it is the movements which they do together which must be thought out and combined so that they give shape and rhythm to the action. For example, it is through their movements together that the children mime the rain as it begins to fall, that they make us feel the roll of the boat during the storm and mutiny of the fourth scene, that they enable us to follow the flight of the dove in the sky; and finally, before going their separate ways, it is together they first set foot on dry land and fight to possess it.

(1962. p.xii)

The character of Noah, his wife Mama (played by Bing) and the Man function differently to the two chorus groups and have more character definition. However, all the characters are simple types and only Noah has a level of psychological development. The way in which Noah talks directly, and often comically and playfully, to the audience in the play can be seen to build on the way in which LC were also openly engaging, and playing with, their audiences. He imitates the winds and storms (Obey 1962, p.1) and talks to the chorus of animals aboard his ark throughout the play. Noah's children enter playing a game and they bring a dynamic energy as a chorus group (ibid, p.4). They perform a 'Pantomime of the children seeking the rain' (ibid p.15) and speak, sing and walk in unison at various points. They also provide the dramatic tension as they plot to overthrow Noah the patriarch and when they go their separate ways when the water subsides. The chorus of animals, and arguably the choice of the biblical story, is a mechanism that allows for the use of all the animal play, and character type, that Bing had been working on since the experiments in 1915. Significantly, Akroyd argues that the animal work was one of the innovative aspects of the production:

Perhaps the most original and impressive scene is [...] in Act III. The dejected and bewildered Noe confides in his animals on the deck of the Ark. Here we have qualities of pathos and naivete and also the joyful grotesqueness of men in animal parts. They are quite honestly actors, or mountebanks, entertaining us as animals.

(1935, p.35)

Lastly, the piece itself is also set in relation to the elements: the boat's motion on the sea; the storms and winds and their rhythms; their existence floating on water; and then their return to dry land. We have seen how Bing and her collaborators used earlier frames of extended embodied play.

Saint-Denis' description of the working process is interesting and he explains that they tried to find out what training was needed 'to enable a group of actors to invent a simple dramatic sequence and to bring it to life on the stage, without having a text set down for them' (1962, p.x). To some extent they had already found the basics of extended embodied play in their previous uses of simple scenarios, but their projects enabled them to take these experiments further. He explains that Obey had only been invited to join them after an initial 'experimental stage' during which time they had developed their own working methods (i.e. extended embodied play) and their own style and that the writer, in this context, would 'join the group [...] to work in strict collaboration with it' (1962, p.x). However, despite the centrality of play in relation to the working method, theme and style, Baldwin argues that Saint-Denis 'allowed improvisation only a specific function' in the process (2003, p.44). Notwithstanding this limitation, her description demonstrates how it was actually what I am terming embodied play that initiated the initial working process and ideas: 'the actors developed prospective themes and characters. The dramatist then took the rough material, gave it shape, and returned it to the director. No longer creators, the actors became, under their director's guidance, faithful interpreters of the text' (2003, p.44). In modern devised theatre parlance this means that Saint-Denis used the actors engaged in embodied play to carry out the core research and development for the project and to devise much of the material, characters and possibly an element of the composition and then handed this material over the writer. However, there was a curious, and conservative, reversion to the notion of actors then becoming more passive interpreters of the text in Saint-Denis's process. Baldwin explains that the rehearsals, with the text they had helped to create in the first period of embodied play, began with Saint-Denis reading the text 'followed by a lengthy exegesis. Next, the actors familiarized themselves with the script through

successive read-throughs' (2003, p.44). Then, she claims, Saint-Denis as director 'blocked the play, having prepared an intricate production plan delineating the set, entrances, exits, the actors' movements, pacing, rhythm, and pauses' (2003, p.44). However, it is hard to know to what extent Saint-Denis actually blocked this material without taking suggestions from his fellow actors who were used to using play to find scored material. As Saint-Denis's claims are at times incorrect, or biased in his own favour, and few records exist it is hard to know how much of this is factually true. Nonetheless, what is evident is that Saint-Denis directly used the methods of play for all the initial creation before reverting to a text and director dominated process.

Saint-Denis threatened the sense of ensemble when he cast an outside and mainstream actor, Pierre Fresnay, to play *Noé* in the hope that he would be a 'drawing card' (Baldwin 2003, p.42). Fresnay had not been involved with any of the three companies or their related schools, in marked contradistinction he had attended the Conservatoire in Paris. This use of a 'star' untrained in their form of embodied play (and its related attitudes) must have been particularly offensive to Bing who had of course been developing this ensemble approach and training since 1913. This problematic choice of casting was also noticed by the audience and critics (Aykroyd 1935) and it received a mixed response: '[T]he actors took bitter satisfaction in Crémieux's unfavorable critique. Writing for the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Crémieux concluded that Fresnay destroyed the troupe's homogeneity. The company was "above all misrepresented by the presence in the midst of them of M. Pierre Fresnay who, in the extravagant monologue of Noah, to which the play is reduced, overwhelms his supporting players"' (Baldwin 2003, p.45). Saint-Denis and Obey together wielded an undemocratic power over the rest of the company and as Baldwin notes '[h]aving recently freed themselves from the tyranny of Copeau, the group was wary of unilateral decision-making. In theory, the Quinze was a company of equals, a cooperative in which decisions were taken collectively' (2003, pp.42-43). Baldwin explains that '[a]scribing the Copeaus's collapse to Copeau's need for total control, [the company was] reluctant to entrust Michel with much

authority' (ibid). She argues that 'a large faction believed the choice of plays, casting, and even directing decisions should be a communal responsibility. Saint-Denis, conversely, believed he had earned his position through his long apprenticeship as Copeau's general factotum and director of several Copiaus productions' (2003, p.43). Effectively Saint-Denis was resisting a more collaborative and communal company structure, like those that emerged in devised theatre in the 1960s, and wanted to keep a position of traditional power and authority. Fresnay left the company and thereafter Boverio and Saint-Denis played the role of Noah; consequently the show was better received in later performances.

*Le Viol de Lucrece* is of equal interest as although it was based on Shakespeare's poem it also drew on the research and experiments with embodied play with chorus, mask, type, rhythm and expressive movement in relation to Japanese Nō Theatre that Bing had led at the Paris school. She directed this seminal process and the staged production of *Kantan* (usually attributed to Zeami, see Kurkinen 2000) over the period of a year (1923-1924). Leabhart (2004, p.326) explains that Bing's notes describe how this project was an application of musical, dramatic, and movement studies (what I am terming embodied play as a broader principle and set of methods) that they had given their students for three years and that the students' improvisations in this style were more related to Nōh than to any contemporary style'. He further explains that Bing's notes 'continue to explain the Nōh project, by explaining that in French at that time there was no word to designate this new form. "Lyrical drama" or "dramatic poem" didn't account for poetry, drama, and music as well as dance, song, declamation, colours and forms, costumes, beautiful movements – above all, the accord among these elements – harmony, discretion, and communication with the audience (Bing)' (2004, p.326). What is particularly interesting about this project is how the Nō offered Bing the chance to further explore embodied play (chorus work, mime, mask work, music, dance, singing and recitation of poetry in a style of performance that is the antithesis to Naturalism) in a very tight frame. Although the piece was never to be



performed to a full audience, the open rehearsal was to be an important point in the school's development. Its significance was documented by Copeau, Saint-Denis and a number of their collaborators and audience members. Kurkinen's thesis *The Spectre of the Orient: Modern French Mime and the Traditional Japanese Theatre in the 1930s* (2000) provides a fascinating analysis of Bing's work on this production and how this impacted on the development of Modernist mime practices in France in the twentieth century. However, there are a certain aspects of this production that warrant discussion in relation to Bing's development of embodied play, albeit in a paradoxically tight structure. *Kantan* is a fifth category Nō play and Kurkinen notes that 'other categories offer more dramatic qualities for a first occidental encounter' (2000, p.213), going on to claim 'it was judged that the students were not yet ready for warrior's ghosts, demons and madwomen' (ibid). In contrast *Kantan* was based on a 'simple story based on a Chinese fable, about a young man [...] who is on his way to the world' (ibid, p.81). Evidently Bing's decision to work on a very simple scenario that had been based on a Chinese fable closely correlates with her previous selection of frames for extended play. Kurkinen notes that Nō Theatre uses three basic character types an old person, a woman and a warrior and '[t]hat all the other roles grow out of these' (2000, p.97), once again this links to Bing and her collaborators' work with embodied play.

Bing did not intend to create a Nō demonstration or imitate the style, but Kurkinen's analysis 'shows that a serious attempt to understand and respect the style of Noh was involved' (ibid, p.83). She notes Nō theatre was developed from 'a kind of mimetic art' and that the movement patterns which use limited, and often stylized gestures, which 'can be classified as realistic (descriptive), symbolic or abstract' (ibid, p.139) which again provided scope for the types of embodied expression that Bing had been using in play. Leonard Pronko's analysis is based on Bing's notes on her work and Kurkinen provides a useful précis of his findings and a translation into English of some of her own writings: 'The group did not try to escape the limits set by the Noh style but confined itself to them. Because the Noh speech is declaimed and chanted, they transposed

the natural rhythms and inflections to music' and he notes 'Faces were kept impassive, gestures were slow and solemn' (Pronko 1967, pp.91-92 cited in Kurkinen 2002, p.83). Pronko cites Suzanne Bing's note on the use of emotion and the theatricality of this form of play:

We ennobled our postures, attempting to make of them a melody of noble and beautiful poses, one engendering the next according to the logic of the drama. A little more daring and obedience, and we composed the dances, one slower, another faster, as required. The Noh actor must never forget that he is *acting* a poem. He must refuse to call on facile personal emotion, which works directly on the emotion of the audience. - The Noh actor leaves the stage exhausted by this constraint.

(Bing cited in Pronko 1967, pp. 91-92)  
(Kurkinen 2000, p.83)

It is fascinating to note Bing's reflection on how Nō also demands that actors do not use their own personal emotion (ego) and that the 'dances' required both 'daring and obedience' as this returns us to the central paradox of play which is particularly hard to achieve in a highly structured frame. Saint-Denis felt that the School's performance of *Kantan* was 'the incomparable summit of our [he was not involved with the school] work in Copeau's school/Laboratory' (Saint-Denis 1982, p.33) although predictably he does not acknowledge Bing as the director of this project in his accounts. Whilst the production of *Kantan* was clearly significant on a number of levels, it is interesting that Jean Dasté felt that other projects, such as 'The Sailor' and 'War' better reflected their overall work (cited in Rudlin 1986, p.48). This is interesting in that these other projects were clearly forms of extended play that were operating within more flexible structures which perhaps allowed for more free play, i.e. Caillois' *paidia* end of the play spectrum, whereas Nō requires play within a much more structured frame, Caillois' *ludus*. The more flexible frames also allowed the embodied play to be more of a generator of the performance material. To some extent the use of Nō as a looser inspiration for *Le Viol de Lucrèce* by CQ found a balance between something freer and more structured.

*Le Viol de Lucrece* was adapted from Shakespeare's poem (which draws on a Roman historian, Titus Livius', account on Lucretia) into a four act play. The piece used interesting narrative devices and they had two 'recitants' and a chorus. Bing and Boverio told the story as masked narrators, whilst the company mimed the action.<sup>22</sup> Bing spoke for Lucrece (played by Dasté) and Boverio for Tarquin (played by Aman Maistre). Brutus was played by Saint-Denis. Baldwin argues that together '[l]ike the waki and the announcer, they furnished the exposition and set the scene for events to come' (2003, p.47). Bing and Boverio were the only actors to be masked (they wore bronze half masks) which Baldwin argues helped to 'underscore their archetypal and godlike qualities' (2003, p.47) and after the opening scene which was performed downstage 'the narrators sat on either side of the set on immense thrones placed before the pillars' (ibid). Baldwin argues that this mirrors the Japanese *waki* who remains seated at the side of the stage following his introduction and the way in which Lucrece performed the majority of her scenes centre stage, frequently on a raised platform, was similar to the *shite* in Nō (2003).<sup>23</sup> Like Noé this production also utilised two choruses; one formed by Lucrece's female maids; the other male military. Baldwin notes that the 'role of the male chorus is slight and expository. The women, on the other hand, enhance the play; they furnish atmosphere and reflect, through gesture and pantomime, Lucrece's virtuous qualities' (2003, p.48). This play was fairly well received, however interestingly 'there were complaints about the actors being reduced to the role of simple mimes, and even fear, that replacing action by commentary reflected a desire to see the death of the theatre' and that on occasion 'the acting was compared to dancing or ballet' (Kurkinen 2000, p.184). However, as Baldwin's research has shown, at this time a rebellion was launched by Dasté, Villard, Boverio and Cavadaski to 'restrict' Saint-Denis' authority. She argues that these problems were eased to some extent when they started to work on *La Bataille de la Marne*. Kurkinen's (2000) analysis argues that Bing's role in

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<sup>22</sup> Rudlin notes that Dasté claimed that one of the things that their training had not provided them with was 'a technique of fine speaking: their skills were mainly corporeal and the long speeches which Obey wrote tended to be given to an actor with a different training such as Suzanne Bing' (1986, p.30).

<sup>23</sup> However, as Kurkinen argues that 'direct allusions to Japanese influence are sparse, almost accidental' and she points out that it is unlikely that any of the company would have seen a live performance of Nō (2000, p.185).

terms of the development of what she describes as mime practice, and the exploration of Japanese theatre forms as part of the modernist performance movements, has never been considered adequately. Indeed, she states: 'Perhaps we should call Suzanne Bing the mother of modern mime. In addition to playing an important role in developing *les masques*, her contribution to the *Kantan* project was most crucial' (p.89). What is also evident is how her work on Nō, in combination with the methods of embodied, and extended play, were also seminal to the work of CQ and the early experiments in devised embodied theatre.

*La Bataille de la Marne* was largely drawn from early forms of extended play that Bing and her collaborators had been working on for some time and was based on events in the First World War. Baldwin (2003) acknowledges that this had, in turn, been based on previous experiments with extended play carried out by LC in Burgundy in which 'the characters and plot were generalized to represent the suffering, violence, heroism, loss, and death of all war' (p.50). However, Kusler notes that 'War' was developed by Bing and the students for the end of school year performances (1924) which is also developed around a very simple (although slightly different) frame for extended play:

[T]hey represent the peaceful life of a family of workers interrupted, broken by the terrible call of the drum. The enemy surges to a bend in the road – fierce and quivering with the terror of being surprised themselves. Combat breaks out without warning, where one knows the combatants think to defend themselves rather than attack. But the father of the family is killed, and his murderer flees in horror from the involuntary crime. Meanwhile the women, driven by a presentiment, wander in the mute and somber countryside. And the wife weeps over her husband.

(Parijaine cited in Kusler 1979, p.45)

Consequently, this returned the company to an area of longstanding research and experimentation, although Saint-Denis and Villard were not involved in the first phase of this work at the school. Baldwin notes that the production style was influenced by Roman comedy and the actors were to wear full masks,

although she notes the considerable problems they encountered due to the masks not arriving until the premiere of the performance (Baldwin 2003, p.51). This is in contrast to the mask play at the school as the making of, and working with, the physical mask was so crucial to this form of embodied play. Saint-Denis explains 'we wanted to get to the roots of the event by a physical representation [...] Having decided on a tentative order of events, we improvised various scenes showing different aspects of everyday life in a village in peacetime. These scenes were done simultaneously. Suddenly the bells of the church began to toll an alarm, warning that war had been declared' (1982, p.34). He explains that various scenes were improvised (life/work in the village, exodus, combat, the armistice, reunion, the realization of loss) and through this their 'ideas gradually came to life and the framework of the play became clear' (Saint-Denis, 1982 p.34). This indicates that the company was still using embodied play within a simple frame, even if after Obey had then produced a script based on their work, Saint-Denis returned the actors to a more conventional role of interpreters. Saint-Denis also noted how Obey had also built on the company's earlier experiments with mimed language in Burgundy, grummelotage, in order to develop a 'kind of "musical" composition which used some real words supplemented by [...] "grummelotage"' (Saint-Denis 1982, p.34). Consequently, even the written language had been influenced by this embodied play, or to some extent Obey found a way to try to 'write' their physical/vocal embodied play. The show had mixed responses although it received the Prix Brieux.

However, after this point Saint-Denis' leadership was challenged. Villard and Aman Maistre left to form their own company (Gilles and Julien) and Dasté and Jean Dasté with Obey and two students left to work independently for a period of time before Dasté and Obey decided to return for a short period. After this period the work of CQ is not of direct relevance to this study. However, it is worth noting that Saint-Denis added new actors and presented new work which was not well received and by 1933 the company membership was just four; only three of the original actors and Saint-Denis. Baldwin notes '[a]s the actors

drifted away, Michel tried to replace them. However, it had taken years of training to create the original ensemble' (2003, p.55). The training that Bing, and her close collaborators had been committed to, was evidently something that Saint-Denis had not fully respected, and possibly understood, in the past. He attempted to train the new actors but this was not successful and in 1935 he disbanded the company and moved to England. Whilst the work of CQ allowed for an innovative use of the extended play methods that evolved into an example of early devised theatre-making, the project was limited by Saint-Denis's vision. Ultimately, his view of the theatre was hierarchical like his uncle's and he returned to the notion that the text, and director's vision, should be the dominant aspect of theatre-making. Saint-Denis wanted to use play as a 'tool' to facilitate a form of theatre-making which centred on the text and in a company which had a markedly hierarchical structure. His later development of actor training programmes at various drama schools can be seen to draw on the embodied methods of play developed by Bing and their other close collaborators, but never 'extends' this play into theatre-making in its own right. His commitment in these programmes is to play-scripts and the director's interpretation consequently this meant that he introduced a de-radicalised and conservative form of embodied play. Notwithstanding these contradictions and problematic ethical questions, the work of CQ, and the way in which most of it was built through and from embodied and extended play, was to influence many of the artists within the company and many other generations of artists.

## **6.2 Chekhov: Extending Play with Texts**

### **6.2.1 Radical Application of Embodied Play: Turning Play-scripts into Play-frames**

This analysis will demonstrate how a radical application of Chekhov's methods of play in relation to play-scripts in the studio context loosened the text so that it operated more like a frame for extended play. This radicalism

correlates to the way in which the ensemble/director draws on these methods of play as a specific directorial and creational strategy. Chamberlain argues that Chekhov's writings on the structure of plays and his related discussion of the analysis of material given in *To The Actor* (2002) is slightly 'out-of-kilter' with his overall approach and 'something of an afterthought to his main body of theory' (in Hodge 2000, p.92). He claims that the four stages of the creative process outlined in *On the Technique of Acting* (1991) is more useful and 'offers a clearer sense of the relationship between training and production' (ibid) and as this study would certainly support this claim the subsequent analysis will draw on the stages outlined in the earlier text and Chekhov's advice for directors that Leonard compiled posthumously (1984). Chekhov notes that these four loose stages actually overlap and do not have to be followed in a precise or pedantic way, leading to original and playful ways of exploring the text, and what he defines as a non-materialistic analysis (04/06/1936, *Lessons for Teachers*). Chekhov views directing as a practice that requires equal playful creativity, arguing that 'it is only by experiments, by attempts at innovation, that [the director] can bring his ingenuity fully into play' (1984, p.78). He argued: 'By doing many experiments which may be wrong, the director will find the right way. A poor director will cling to some of his ideas, but the good director will try everything. Don't be afraid of experiments which can be wrong' (28/01/1937, MC/S1/7/B). He realised that directors are as prone to inhibitions as actors and claims that an effective method for overcoming this is 'the application of the ensemble feeling in rehearsal' (Chekhov 1984, pp.78-79). This relational practice must be based on 'cooperative, collaborative and cocreative ensemble feeling' which requires an 'openheartedness' towards each other and these connections (ibid).

Chekhov suggests that early in a rehearsal process a company might work through (or play within) a score of Atmospheres that they have identified in the play (Chekhov 1991, p.149) in contrast to undertaking detailed, rational-intellectual textual analysis around a table. Indeed, he told his students to '[l]isten and rely on the atmosphere and you will get more suggestions than you

will from any director in the world' (21/08/1939 cited in du Prey 1978). His suggestion that a director enables the same scene/section be played a number of times by the actors exploring different 'grounds' for play (e.g. Ease, Form, Style, Psychological Gesture, Imaginary Centre, etc. 1991, 2002) is reminiscent of 'toys' being available to play with in relation to the script, as a more flexible frame. In the context of Chekhov's technique operating as a synthetic Whole, often one 'toy' will bring the others into play, and these can be combined or swapped, but what is important is the way in which each reduces and channels the actor's focus differently, and thereby increases their creativity and triggers a different use of the ego. The director may remain with one 'ground' for a period of time, return to previous 'grounds' and later combine two, three or more together (Chekhov 1991, pp.53-154). In addition to this intuitive playing with various 'grounds' and 'toying' with the space and objects used (1984, p.81), he also argues that if the director and actors have an understanding of the play they are approaching in rehearsal there is no need to approach the material in a linear manner. Indeed he argues that a linear process tends to 'codify and formalise everything into a monotonous pattern' and that in fact, these inflexible approaches often mean that important moments are neglected' (ibid, p86). Instead, he proposes that a director 'upsets this orderly but antiquated rehearsal procedure' by approaching the scenes in a different order, 'or with just so many pages from anywhere in the script that he chooses to experiment with' (ibid, p86). He notes that 'once a new beginning has been created' in this way 'the cast is out of the rut of repetition and on the alert' (ibid, p.86). Further he suggests that the director propose an exploration of the various different forms of Polarity between the beginning and end of the section, sidetracking the middle section temporarily, in order to make new discoveries. These fresh beginnings operate like newly configured frames for their extended play; it keeps the ensemble 'in the moment'. Chekhov argues that it is problematic to concentrate on one scene too early on and argues that the 'performance will ripen more organically if the cast is given the opportunity to fly over the whole play at each stage of work and even if possible, during rehearsals' (ibid, pp.152-153). This also enables actors to gain an understanding of The Whole (1991,



p.153). Moments that the ensemble identifies as significant moments act as 'signposts' that indicate their general approach to the play and actors continue to find Psychological Gestures that connect these moments (in relation to text and dynamics not just character). Chekhov notes that an ensemble working in this way will have imaginatively, and collectively, found a clearer sense of the dynamics and direction of the scene and a more imaginatively embodied sense of the composition than could be found in a more linear and conventional approach (ibid, p.87). In the fourth stage of rehearsal, Chekhov suggests directors enable their actors to focus on developing a divided consciousness, an element we have already established is shared with Bing et al's form of embodied play (1991, p.155). The development of the Divided Conscious also helps the actors to connect, and play with, their audience more fully.

This playful approach to rehearsal also functions as a form of non-materialistic textual analysis which is perhaps better defined as a process of accumulative and relational synthesis (1985, p.11). Chekhov argues that whilst the actor must know as much as possible about the play, the important difference is 'how he knows it' (1985, p.38). In contrast to what he defines as cold factual intellect he suggests that we can access a 'knowledge [which] is at the same time an imaginative picture' through the use of his methods. In this process the 'intellect is still in the position of a servant who carries a candle, and does nothing but throw light' (Chekhov 1985, p.38). He provocatively, but tellingly in relation to play, suggests that only when the actor is 'far enough [with their] childish movements and gestures, and have really enjoyed this period of [their] work' that they could 'read about the play' (ibid, p.117). As we have seen, virtually any of his 'grounds' (i.e. Imaginary Body/Centre, Objective Atmosphere, Rhythm, Psychological Gesture) can be played with in order to produce forms of complex imaginatively embodied 'knowledge' and, at a slightly later stage, an intellectual knowledge. Du Prey's descriptions of the work they undertook on *Adventures of Samuel Pickwick* at the Studio (21/08/1939) indicate the way in which they were exploring, analysing and considering the text through an application of these playful grounds. The methods of play are specifically

embodied as Chekhov argued that everything happening in rehearsal can be 'interpreted' by 'gesture, action or movement' (1985, p.107). The following notes which guide/record their use of Chekhov's methods of highly embodied play in relation to a specific scene are particularly important in this respect: 'Long, expansive gesture. Rocking on a very big wave – a pleasant rocking. [...] Moulding definite gestures and shapes. Quality of strenuous thinking – trying to grasp. [...] Torn between two things, here and there. Wide expansion' (cited in du Prey 1978, pp.24-25). Chekhov uses the actor's training in Gesture, found through his methods of embodied play with these different grounds, to explore everything: a character's action; psychological state; an entire scene; a dynamic exchange; atmosphere. This can be explored inwardly, outwardly, or both concurrently.

These playful methods enables the ensemble to discover (though embodied play) an understanding of the characters and their relationships and what they collectively perceive as the essential structural, dynamic and atmospheric qualities of the text/material. Significantly this is a collaborative and relational journey of discovery, the understanding is located in the imaginative relationship between the actors themselves and the material they are working with, in contrast to the implementation of a single director's interpretation of the play or an individual actor's analysis of their own character in more isolated terms. What is also seminal about these records is the way that they reveal important parallels with the forms of embodied play that Bing and her collaborators used in their practice.

Chekhov indicates that his approach enables actors to engage with, and 'see' play-scripts in quite specific ways. He argues that whilst the 'nonactor' simply reads the lines of a play-script 'the actor reads between the lines, sees beyond the characters and events of the play. These magic "beyond" and "between" places make up that kingdom in which the talented actor lives and moves freely' (1991, p.71). He points out that from this position the actor 'sees the whole play as a stimulus, as a series of signs and indications behind and

beyond the words urging and guiding him in his individual acting' (ibid). There is an interesting correlation between Chekhov's ideas about how an actor reads the in-between and beyond in play texts and Cixous' ideas about *écriture féminine* in this context. Cixous argues:

writing is precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other without which nothing can live [...] dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another [...] a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations of the same into the other and into the in-between

(Cixous 2010, p.36)

Consequently I am arguing that it is an application of his methods of play to a play-script that enable ensembles to 'see', 'encounter' and 'interpret' it as a flexible stimulus, which is a more porous frame of signs and indications creating space for extended embodied play. The notes for the Studio's open rehearsal of *Spanish Evening* (MC/S1/17) provide important evidence of this radical approach. The piece was written by Henry Young (based on scenes by Cervantes) in a collaborative process, and inspired by the highly playful mode of Commedia dell'arte. They performed a 'series of small sketches or scenes done on two or three different grounds', i.e. the play provided a frame (signs and indications) for a use of these different 'grounds' of embodied play, as the notes indicate: '(1) Minjaca (Paula) and Manager (Peter) Grounds: Quality of polite sweetness. Legato and Staccato (2) Scaramouche, Pierrot and two girls. Grounds: Atmosphere. Rhythmical pattern (6) Fight between Scaramouche & Pierrot. Grounds: Feeling of form (7) Angelica's soliloquy. Grounds: First without music. Second with music and quality of being drunk' (MC/S1/17). We see here clear grounds for play; movement qualities, legato/staccato, atmosphere, rhythm, form and music. What these archive notes evidence is that Chekhov was teaching his students a certain type of playful radicalism in their use of these methods in relation to play-scripts, thereby preparing them to work as more empowered creators who are able to use texts as a frame to extend their play in a manner similar to the simple scenarios or fairytales.

### 6.2.2 Taking 'Liberties' with Adaptation

Bing and her collaborators, and Chekhov, frequently adapted texts by various playwrights and writers of other fiction. They were prepared to 'play' with the text and concurrently approached these texts as frames to play within. Chekhov's approach to adaptation of both play-scripts and non-theatrical texts centralised the actor and their embodied play. He reflected on his positive experience of directing the Habma production of *Twelfth Night* (Berlin 1930, London 1931) which he adapted: '[a]t times, one or other of the cast would have his doubts as to whether I was taking too many liberties with Shakespeare. However, their doubts were quickly allayed' (2005, p.157). He continued to take 'liberties' with texts in his training programme at the Studio and, as noted by du Prey, he felt perfectly happy taking these 'liberties' with texts (*Twelfth Night* and *King Lear*) which he adapted for their professional touring company in North America. She explains: 'He felt that Meyerhold was absolutely justified when he took the sacred cow of Russian literature, Gogol's *The Inspector General* and cut out things and re-arranged them to suit his controversial production [...] but he conceded the truth of the production as Meyerhold saw it, because it was in his terms truthful (1978, p.14). What Chekhov defines as the right of the actor and director to look beyond the play text itself clearly relates to this notion of creative 'truth'. A use of different methods of play, in the exploration/adaptation of a text, clearly changes the notion of the play text (or playwright) being the dominant factor. It was not a case of disrespecting the text, but perhaps making the text more 'elastic' through the use of methods of embodied play, to borrow Copeau's metaphor. Unsurprisingly, he questioned the notion of their being one 'correct' interpretation of a playwright's intention. He argued: 'I always feel very unhappy when someone says, "But that is not Shakespeare!" How do we know what Shakespeare thought or saw? I have my Shakespeare and you have yours – no one has the right to criticize it' (Chekhov 1985, p.40). He suggests that a company should 'start with reading the play, but overlooking the thoughts, the logic of everything and to, first of all, throw away everything I have known about the play [...] and start anew [...] every kind of reading is right and even no

reading is right' (ibid, p.53). Chekhov's methods of play in rehearsal creates this elasticity and therefore gives the text a level of greater openness which allows embodied play to signify on equal terms; this parallels some of the work by CQ. In addition to adapting classical and canonical texts, he also adapted Anton Chekhov's short stories, had hoped to adapt *Don Quixote*, and worked repeatedly on adaptations of stories by Charles Dickens and adapted fairytales, folktales and myths at the studio.

### 6.2.3 Playing with Writers

Chekhov started to work collaboratively with writers in his production of *The Castle Awakens* and these experiments were to continue at the Studio. Chekhov 'wanted to attract resident playwrights, as part of [the] company, who would be able to come up with a script and develop it, something in the manner of the Commedia dell'arte, and [...] eventually to write serious plays too' (du Prey 1978, p.14). Both Morgan and Hatfield were to collaboratively 'write' fairytales as extended frames for their training at the Studio. Du Prey notes the collaborative nature of these projects, including work with Henry Lyon Young and Iris Tree. She also discusses how the Studio worked collaboratively with Arnold Sundgaard to develop a play called *Troublemaker-Doublemaker* in Connecticut. Her description of this process reveals the way in which they were able to develop the scenes in different ways (very probably based on different grounds of play):

The playwright worked right with us, following rehearsals, and Chekhov would tell him what he wanted, and the playwright could see it developing. We would try things and drop this or that, or take the scene another way, and Arnold Sundgaard was always flexible – few playwrights would be as flexible as that, but that is the kind of playwright that Chekhov hoped to attract, one who would be part of the company, who contributed his own gifts as a playwright, and out of that association would come plays that would be very close to the style of the company. He saw us as a company with a certain style which we presented to the audience.

(1978, p.14)

Once again we see the need for the playwright to be 'flexible' in this creation of a frame for their play, and being able and willing to write for/with the 'style of the company' is also reminiscent of Obey's work for CQ a few years earlier. Chekhov was looking for a very specific type of writer who would be willing to collaborate fully with the director and ensemble:

[...]perhaps a director will want to withhold the words of the play until he has produced some gestures, etc., while another director will perhaps ask his cast to listen to the text and then give some exercises, gestures, etc. There must be absolute freedom. The play must be invented when the rehearsals are going on. It must not be written before. It must be written during the rehearsing. Only in this way will we get some new results. If we take the same habits from the theatre which exists now, we have nothing to add. The designer can also make suggestions which may affect the whole play.

(28/01/1937, MC/S1/7/B)

Marowitz notes that Chekhov and Shdanoff had conversations with Tennessee Williams with the hope of working with him at the Studio and that Vladimir Nabokov had applied to become their resident playwright, but this did not materialise prior to the close of the studio (2004, p.195). He explains that that they were never able to find an external playwright to join company and argues '[p]laywrights, no matter what degree of eminence, found it hard to relinquish the sacred act of personal authorship' (ibid, p.168). When asked by a student if it is hard for an author to see their play directed in a manner different to their own conception, Chekhov's answer is radical in its clarity: 'Yes, but I have more sympathy with the actors, I love them more. It is a question to whom you belong [...] The theatre is the theatre, and we are not slaves to our authors' (02/04/1937, MC/S1/7/B). At the same class he stresses 'I don't want the actor to be forced by the author' (ibid), but explains he is not denying the writer, but rather he wants them to have 'another attitude of mind towards the theatre', which is dependent on being 'absolutely free and open to one another' (ibid). It is hard to imagine what a collaboration with Williams, Nabokov or another writer who was truly able to work as an equal, open and free collaborator would have produced, but it is evident that Chekhov was only interested in a writer who

could engage with his playful methods and approach and who would work with their own imaginatively embodied 'style'.

### **6.3 Chekhov: Taking Extended Play into Public Performance**

Whilst Chekhov's students had been making performance through an application of extended play at the Studio he was not always happy with the work produced, however he was clearly committed to this way of working and it certainly appears to be an organic extension of his playful methods and ideas. In 1939 they moved from studio-based performance to an application of these methods for a commercial Broadway production of *The Possessed*. It was directed by Chekhov and 'written' by his long term collaborator Shdanoff. Black (1983), Byckling (1995) and Chamberlain (2004) provide useful discussions of this production process. Chamberlain pulls together the, sadly limited, archival materials to present a sound argument that this production was an early example of devised practice which involved the company working closely in collaboration with the writer, freely exploring the text through cycles of improvisation/writing and adding new features (such as the character of The Stranger who tells the folktale of Ivan the Terrible). Chamberlain's argument is supported by this thesis which, for the first time, has analysed the way in which Chekhov's methods operate as forms of embodied play, which were then extended at the studio into the generation of small-scale performance thereby training the actors to be 'creators' of theatre, or 'devisors' in modern parlance. Like Bing's use of extended embodied play the methodology and early work for this show actually took place within the Studio setting. Black explains that whilst at Dartington they had already been working on 'a series of improvisations and scenes based on Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot* and *The Possessed*' (1983, p.35). Like their earlier work on *The Castle Awakens*, and many of the small-scale projects at the studio, the production was based on a non-theatrical text; Dostoevsky's novel. The non-theatrical nature of the material arguably meant that the text was automatically more porous and elastic in terms of giving space for an application of embodied

play. Although the majority of the actors had trained at the studio Chamberlain (2004) argues that the fact that they were student-actors meant that the 'company were very inexperienced and not really skilled enough to model Chekhov's method at its full potential' (ibid, p.83). In addition he points out that Chekhov had hired two professional actors, who were not trained at the Studio, to take on minor roles (ibid, p.91), which was clearly problematic as we have seen with the work of CQ. Chamberlain also provides a detailed analysis of the reaction to the production and in summary he describes the work as '[a]n exciting piece of physical theatre with detailed characterization, performed in a style [including stylized, grotesque physicality] which was not fully grasped by the Broadway critics' (ibid, p.103). He concludes that there 'were some weaknesses in the overall control of the performance, which affected the performance dynamics, but this was a surprisingly accomplished performance by a young company' (ibid). Marowitz claims that Chekhov 'was fairly poleaxed' by the reception of *The Possessed* and sadly he decided against staging *Pickwick* despite the preliminary work that he had done on this other project, which would have used extended play to 'devise' the material from another novel. Instead they staged *Twelfth Night*, which Chamberlain notes was perhaps not surprisingly better received as the style and subject matter may have been more to the critics taste (ibid). Sadly Chekhov was not to direct another theatre production that was to use, and extend, his methods of play to such an extent in his lifetime. However, his writings and the extensive documentation clearly provide not only the methods of embodied play for actors, but processes of extending this play and also radical approaches to directing this type of embodied theatre.

Whilst the development of these different forms of extended embodied play were complex, full of 'impure' features and not always completely successful, this chapter has argued that this work by Bing, Chekhov and their collaborators made significant contributions to early devised theatre practice. Sadly neither Bing nor Chekhov were able to teach using extended embodied play in a studio context again in their lives, nor were they to continue to devise



performance in the later years of their careers. Consequently, there are only certain points of emergence to consider. Whilst this makes totalising historical narrative, and clear points of 'ownership' difficult, it concurrently demonstrates the central argument of this thesis that we need to embrace genealogy rather than a history of static purity, ownership or indeed evaluations that are based on commercial 'success' if we are to understand this strand of extended embodied play and how it trained actors for, and fed directly into, professional devised theatre and the practitioners who continued this genealogy.

# Conclusion

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## 1. Introduction

This thesis has demonstrated the previously unrecognised significance of the ways in which Bing and Chekhov utilised forms of embodied play in the training of actors and how this led to the development of their respective forms of embodied theatre through a focus on selected examples. There are seven key elements to this argument. (1) It has addressed how these forms of play worked in practice and the integral connection to their respective pedagogic and theatre-making processes in broader and holistic terms. (2) This study has considered how, and why, both Bing and Chekhov extended their methods of embodied play in their training and has concluded that this movement from play used solely for the acquisition of discrete skill or character creation to extended forms of play enabled them to train actors to work as empowered creators of small-scale performance in their Schools and Studios. An analysis of the points of convergence and moments of distinct divergence in their extension of play has facilitated a study of the selected frames and tools used for this aspect of the training. (3) This consideration of the extension of play has also presented an analysis of how this led Bing, Chekhov, and their collaborators, to experiment with radical approaches to working with texts, writers, and other frames through, and in relation to, embodied play. (4) The analysis concludes that these approaches resulted in a space being made for the imaginatively embodied expression to signify strongly in the meaning-making processes of the performances. (5) The re-framing of selected productions by LC and CQ and a re-consideration of Obey's contribution, in order to analyse it through the prism of Bing and her close collaborators' previous experiments with extended embodied play in the training context, has created a much needed her-story of French actor training and theatre making with attention to relations of gender and power in traditional historical discourses. (6) This her-story reveals both

important correlations between these three phases of work in the French context, linking training and the process of making, and troubling ethical questions about the attempts by men to 'own' and 'control' this practice in individualistic terms. This disrupts the still largely dominant patriarchal historical narratives that centre on Copeau and Saint-Denis and demonstrates how Bing's work developed over a long period of time, through acts of creative cross-fertilisation with Copeau and other collaborators, as demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5. (7) A comparative analysis of the work of Bing and Chekhov has also contributed to the current scholarship on play centring on Lecoq's term of *Le Jeu*, suggesting that the broader term of embodied play enables a wider and more dynamic consideration of the different uses of embodied play in relation to both historical and contemporary actor training and theatre-making.

The genealogical methodology has been crucial to this study as whilst Kusler's (1979) seminal study notes these correlations to some extent it lacks the radicalism necessary to put forward a more challenging argument about Bing. Kusler does not consider this practice in relation to a practice of play as principle and methods in detailed terms. Donahue (2001, 2008) has added valuable material on Bing's work in relation to what he perceives as more discrete areas of training: improvisation and mask, and rightly notes that her contribution has not been adequately acknowledged, but does not consider how this relates to the later methods of extending play and theatre-making practices of the later companies. Baldwin (2003, 2010) partially acknowledges this borrowing from Bing in the work of LC and CQ, although her evaluation remains largely dominated by Saint-Denis' narrative. Curiously, Baldwin also seems unwilling to follow up some of the discoveries she makes in her research with regards to how Bing, Dasté and Jean Dasté, felt about their practice being used in what they clearly felt was an exploitative manner by Saint-Denis and Villard. Consequently, this project has offered a very different analysis of the later work of LC and CQ and has therefore strengthened the existing scholarship on Bing.

Similarly, this study has revealed how Chekhov drew on his own forms of what I have termed embodied and extended play throughout his practice, and has offered an analysis of a correlated interest in working with non-theatrical text and in collaboration with playwrights at the Studio. This research has shown that this use of extended embodied play provided the training and preparation for the student actors to participate in what Chamberlain (2004) accurately describes as an early 'devising' theatre-making process for Chekhov's professional production of *The Possessed*. This re-consideration of Chekhov's work through an analysis of his use of play has led to a new way of understanding his practice and helps to identify and better acknowledge the radical aspect of his work, as distinct to the approach of Stanislavsky. Chamberlain (2004) and McDermott (2005) rightly defined aspects of Chekhov's work as devised practice some time ago, but what has been lacking was a detailed analysis of how actors were actually trained in a play-based approach which prepared them to create, or devise, small-scale studio-based, or professional performances. Consequently, this research has argued that Chekhov's practice, despite not coming from the French tradition, must be considered in relation to the current dominant discourse on play in actor training and theatre-making.

## **2. Genealogies of Embodied Play and Devised Theatre**

A Foucauldian and Feminist form of genealogy has enabled an analysis of Bing and Chekhov's practices precisely because it has not sought to locate single or pure 'origins' but rather has facilitated the consideration of the messy, cross-fertilised and impure nature of their work. It has therefore enabled a re-consideration of moments of emergence that are often hidden by patrilineal linear histories. This genealogy has made a case for Bing who has been generally under-recognised and has considered her practice in relation to what I have termed embodied and extended play which better considers the connected, but different, aspects of her work. This genealogical mapping has also enabled a consideration of Chekhov's practice through a distinctly different

prism consequently providing a new way of understanding his practice and how and why his use of embodied play was also connected to his developments in devised embodied theatre.

In a number of recent publications (Oddey 1994, Heddon and Milling 2006, Govan et al 2007 and Mermikides et al 2010) the complex relationship between these earlier forms of embodied play developed by Bing, Chekhov and their collaborators, and its relationship to devising practice are sadly inadequate. There is no discussion of Bing (as a named individual) in any of these accounts, although the two later texts reference Copeau and the work on play to some extent. Chekhov's use of play and early devising practice is totally absent from these studies. No doubt this corresponds to the reliance on the dominant historical discourses on early French practice and possibly certain assumptions or misunderstandings about the practice of Chekhov. These early experiments in using embodied/extended play for training and for devising theatre were complex, collaborative, and not always easy or entirely successful processes for Bing and Chekhov, but they are of historical significance in relation to this area of theatre making. The absence of a detailed discussion of Bing, Chekhov and their collaborators' earlier use of embodied play in this literature results in a partial and under-developed analysis. The more rigorous study of these two practitioners presented in this thesis forms an important bridge between the early years of the twentieth century and Lecoq's seminal work in the 1950s which is generally seen as a crucial moment in the development of devised theatre, and what is often classified by Murray and Keefe's (2007) umbrella term of Physical Theatres. The differences between these practices also need to be addressed to broaden the discussion about forms of embodied play and its relationship to devised practice.

We can clearly see traces of the methods of embodied play, and approaches to / frames used for the extension of play, developed by Bing, Chekhov and their collaborators in current devised practice in Britain (for example see the work of Clod Ensemble, Clout, Complicite, The David Glass

Ensemble, Improbable, Kneehigh and John Wright). Obviously these later practitioners have drawn on, but also in turn transformed and blended, these earlier practices of embodied play, but arguably we cannot really understand these practices in historical and creative terms, nor fully address the correlated critical issues that arise, without acknowledging the use of play by Bing and Chekhov in relation to this area of practice. Improbable's work is particularly useful in this respect as McDermott is one of the founding Directors of the company and, as has been discussed, draws on Chekhov's form of embodied play along with aspects of French play from Gaulier, the work of Keith Johnstone, and others. The company works in a highly collaborative and playful manner and have produced shows and projects that have been largely improvised, such as their version of Johnstone's *Lifegame* (1998 – present). Much of their work has also involved the audience as participants, such as their interactive performance *Sticky* (1998-2003), highlighting and extending the relational exchange and play with spectators. Clod Ensemble are a useful example in the French context as Suzy Wilson and Paul Clark, the two artists directors, originally trained with Lecoq and fuse this form of play with various other influences and interests, including working with actors, musicians, dancers, clowns and live artists, for example in their production of *Under Glass* (2007 – present).

As noted in Chapter 5, there is also a correlation between the frames for extended embodied play used by Bing and Chekhov early in the twentieth century and contemporary devised practice. Artists who are devising forms of Physical and Embodied Theatre continue to use known texts including fairytales, folktales and myths. The attraction of various known, but non-theatrical texts, has remained as a way of framing extended play leading to the creation of performance. In 1992 there were two seminal productions in this respect: David Glass Ensemble's *Gormenghast* based on the novels by Mervyn Peake; and Complicite's *Street of Crocodiles* based on the life and writings of Bruno Schulz. Companies have also continued to draw on fairytales and gothic children's stories in a manner not dissimilar to Bing and Chekhov. Improbable's

co-production with the Tiger Lily's, *Shock Headed Peter* (1998), is a useful exemplar as it was based on the children's book *Der Struwwelpeter* written by Dr. Henrich Hoffman (1845) and includes a number of dark stories with fantastical characters and events. They also produced Angela Carter's re-telling of *Cinderella* the same year. The recent work of Kneehigh who originally made work for children and families, has also drawn on these types of stories. For example *The Red Shoes* (2001) and *The Wooden Frock* (2004) which was adapted from the Cinderella family of stories, *Rapunzel* (2006) and *Hansel & Gretel* (2009).<sup>24</sup> More recently they produced *Midnight's Pumpkin* (2012) which was their own re-telling of Cinderella that encouraged and enabled the audience to participate and 'play' at various points in the show. As with Bing and Chekhov all the directors of the companies cited were, and often remain, actors and their forms of embodied play are actor-centred. This remains a crucial difference to the work of other directors in the UK who have often not formally trained as either directors or actors. With the exception of Clout and Complicite, all of the companies have been interested in extending the type of relational exchange and forms of play with their audiences in various projects and in different ways. This notion of playing with the audience, as well as within the ensemble, starts to enter into the terrain of what is often termed Applied Theatre and represents a very interesting development of this practice. It is also useful to remember in this context that Bing's later work with LC and CQ also explored a more dynamic form of play with rural audiences and that Chekhov had hoped to create a fairytale theatre company for children and families. This notion of sharing play in a relational way with the audience arguably empowers the spectators in a manner similar to the performers in these various forms of actor-centred Embodied Theatre.

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<sup>24</sup> Kneehigh was founded in Cornwall in 1980 Mike Shepherd, a village school teacher, started running theatre workshops. Over time a number of other people joined him including a farmer and a number of students none of whom had been formally trained in performance. Together they developed theatre for families within their communities in various locations and site specifically. Emma Rice originally joined the company as an actor and then started to direct a number of their devised productions. Rice trained at Guildhall School of Music and Drama and later with Gardzienice in Poland. Whilst Kneehigh do not claim to have one specific method or style Rice does centralise play and games in their training/making process, for example she cites keepy uppy, grandmother's footsteps, blind man's buff (see Radosavljević 2010, pp.89-98) and their website explains 'Armed with instinct, play and our building blocks of music, text and design, Kneehigh do fearsome battles' ([www.kneehigh.co.uk](http://www.kneehigh.co.uk)/accessed 01/09/13)

We can also now chart a history of theatre companies who have worked collaboratively with writers, including the early partnerships between Caryl Churchill and various collaborators such as Max Stafford-Clark, Monstrous Regiment and Ian Spink and Orlando Gough. More recent collaborations between writers and companies that are often classified as making Physical Theatres have included projects by Frantic Assembly and Theatre O. We can also see continued experiments with embodied play within tighter frames or modes of performance, such as Mnouchkine's work with Théâtre du Soleil in Paris, which arguably shares certain traits and practices with Bing's earlier experiments with Nō theatre, the subsequent work with CQ and her collaborations with Dasté, Jean Dasté and Lecoq in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Neither Bing nor Chekhov had the financial support, or capacity, for aggressive self promotion that may have enabled them to continue working in school/studio contexts, or to become Artistic Directors of large organisations in which they could have continued to use extended embodied play as a method of creating devised theatre for professional performances. However, the genealogical links connecting these earlier artists to those working later in the twentieth and twenty-first century are significant. Bing's methods of play were shared, and transformed, through embodied exchange between generations of practitioners in France, and later around the world. Whilst Chekhov's methods were also shared through embodied exchanges by his former collaborators and students in the USA, his methods had a different genealogical transmission in the British context.

### **3. Genealogical Traces and Transformations of Chekhov's Embodied Play**

Daboo (2012) has provided a productive approach to the analysis of the pathways and exchanges through which Chekhov's lineage has been used, developed, and transformed since his death. She discusses the difference between the embodied nodes of teaching and cross-fertilisation in the web of



practices in the USA and the very different forms of transmission in Britain. Her recognition that the British lineage is 'one of fracturing and divergence and re-making' (ibid, p.80) reflects the impure and cross-fertilised nature of the early genealogy that this thesis is addressing in general. Ashperger (2008), who works in the United States, argues that 'Chekhov's acting technique is clearly rooted in the western theatrical tradition, in that the overall aim of learning the technique is the interpretation or re-interpretation of either classical or new works of Western dramatic literature' (p.4). Whilst there is a flexibility implied in the term 're-interpretation', Ashperger is very specific about 'dramatic literature'. While Chekhov's techniques are highly flexible and can be used for various forms and styles of contemporary and classical theatre, this thesis has demonstrated that Chekhov was also interested in applying his methods of embodied and extended play to other forms of non-theatrical literature, stories, and scenarios which led to training which did train actors and directors to interpret/re-interpret existing dramatic texts but concurrently trained them to create and make performance in alternative ways. As discussed in Chapter 5, an application of his methods to a process of exploring and directing 'dramatic texts' can also lead to radical outcomes. Indeed, what is of particular relevance to this project is the number of British theatre practitioners who draw on Chekhov technique in relation to the more radical application of his playful methods and devising theatre-making processes. For example, Chamberlain, Cornford, Daboo, Dixon, Heimann, Kane, McDermott, Pitches, Rushé, Weaver, Wright, and myself all have backgrounds in devised theatre practice. The fact that all these practitioners have also all had training in other embodied and play-based practices (ranging from Eurythmy and gymnastics, to martial arts, various forms of dance, modern mime and yoga) also correlates to the highly embodied forms of play that Chekhov developed. It would be fair to argue that many of these artists are indeed producing what McDermott has suggested we term Embodied Theatre through a use of what I have shown to be methods drawing on Embodied Play.

Kane has developed Chekhov method in relation to both voice work, and creative pedagogic practice, i.e. teacher training. In the context of embodied play and its therapeutic potential in relational exchanges, Sharp has been using Chekhov's methods as psychotherapist and Zoe Brooks (Bazooka Arts) has been using them in her work as a drama therapist for a number of years. It has also been used for the training of post-graduate Applied Performance practitioners at Goldsmiths by myself for use with specific client groups. A number of former undergraduate and postgraduate students who have trained with me in the forms of embodied play developed by Chekhov and Bing are now using it in their own professional practice, in their own way. Some exemplars include Rebecca Frecknall a director at the National Theatre and with her company seeitinyourhead, Chloe Stephens a director with Page One Theatre Company and more recently a new collaborative company GRUFF who use Chekhov's form of play to enable them to devise shows in relation to specific sites. Early in 2013 I was invited to train directors at the National Theatre Studio in my approach to Chekhov Technique, in particular what I have identified as his form of embodied play for the training of actors and directors, and for theatre-making. In 2012 myself, Tom Cornford (York) and Sinead Rushé (Central School of Speech & Drama) were invited to join the central team of the Michael Chekhov Centre UK to help develop the organisation in relation to the different strands of contemporary practice both within and beyond the field of theatre. This has led to the development of a forthcoming practice-based research project exploring the use of Chekhov Technique in contemporary practice, including a project on its use in relation to using his forms of embodied play as directors and for devising theatre which I will lead. All of these developments over the past twenty years in the UK would imply a willingness to embrace a more radical and overt use of Chekhov's methods of embodied and extended play not only in actor training, but also in wider contexts. This is clearly an area for further research in this field.

Daboo also discusses the issue of 'impure' blends and questions of authenticity in relation to Chekhov technique (2012) and this warrants

consideration. Daboo cites Dixon and Callow who both lament that Chekhov's practice has been 'sidelined as a method for physical theatre performances only' (p.81), however she points out that this 'is perhaps to be expected that approaches to teaching his work would be adapted for a contemporary theatre' (ibid). This thesis makes the case that it is Chekhov's use of highly imaginative and transformative embodied play methods in his actor training, and their extension into processes of theatre-making, that forms certain points of convergence with the French genealogical web of play practice (what I am terming Embodied Theatre) and leads to some of these innovative, but impure, 'blends'. As noted in Chapter 1, Petit is the only artist known to the author who was taught by practitioners who had in turn been trained by both Bing (Decroux) and Chekhov (Cutting) and it is highly significant that he strongly emphasises the playful nature of Chekhov technique in his handbook (2010). However, McDermott (2005) also notes points of convergence between his use of Chekhov technique as an 'inspiration', and his training with Gaulier (a former student of Lecoq) which I would argue is linked to their respective interests in forms of imaginatively embodied play. Glass and Wright also trained with Lecoq and their practice blends aspects of both of these play-based techniques, along with other inspirations and approaches. My own initial training and theatre work was with the Lecoq/French strand of play and modern mime (and in particular work with Glass) and I also identified clear points of contact between this training and Chekhov's use of play.

While many British practitioners also use Chekhov's techniques in relation to more conventionally Naturalistic productions based on pre-existing play texts (i.e. an application of play within a more tightly structured frame), including classical theatre, and in the case of Sharp film and television work (see Daboo 2012), it does seem fair to argue that the way in which Chekhov's methods centralise an expressive form of physicality and play has evidently been something that has attracted various British artists to his practice in recent years. The beauty of Chekhov's use of embodied play is that it can also be used in a 'covert' manner by actors without the knowledge of the director they

might be working with. For example the actor could be playing with Chekhov's methods of the Imaginary Body and Imaginary Centre to develop their character without the director's knowledge or indeed consent. Consequently, actors can be quietly, but fundamentally, radical in their use of Chekhov's embodied play even within tightly scored productions that are not overtly following a Chekhovian directorial and/or making process. This covert 'quiet' radicalism is also what ensures that the actor is empowered and is always able to draw on embodied play.

#### **4. Genealogical Traces and Transformations of Bing's Embodied Play**

Thus far there has been no specific consideration of the genealogical pathways that extend out from the work of Bing to the later strands of French embodied play such as the one provided by Daboo (2012) on Chekhov's lineage. Bing's contribution is generally obscured due to the way in which traditional histories have focussed on Copeau's abandonment of the more radical play project in the later years and the subsequent dominance of Saint-Denis' narrative. Whilst Bing, Saint-Denis and their collaborators were to take embodied play to perhaps its most radical extension in a number of the productions created by LC and CQ, Saint-Denis was ultimately to de-radicalise this practice through his later re-commitment to a notion of the hierarchal dominance of the text and the role of the author and director in the work of CQ. This continued in his later use of embodied play in the design of conservatoire actor training courses in England, Canada and the USA, placing it in a much more subservient position in relation to the text and the vision of the director. He also effectively ceased to extend this practice of embodied play for the creation of school performance for public audiences. Historically this is significant as it highlights the division between this de-radicalised strand of embodied play practice and the more radical practices that came to be known as 'Modern Mime' and mask practice, until the rise of what Murray and Keefe (2007) describe as significant strand of the wider continuum of Physical Theatres. Bing's methods of embodied and extended play can be traced through a diverse genealogical network of practitioners that she taught, learnt

from, mentored and collaborated with. The work of Dasté, Jean Dasté, Dorcy and Decroux as her former students and close collaborators were central in this respect. The Dastés were seminal in development of embodied play, with and without mask, in the French theatre. They also directed two Japanese Nō inspired productions *Sumida* (1947) and *Kakegiyo the Furious* (1951) both of which were liberally adapted by Bing. Dorcy claimed that this work enabled French theatre to take 'a giant step forward' (1975, p.21) and he argued that it was thanks to their training by Bing that the Dastés knew this mode of performance, and the various solo and chorus parts, well enough to mount these productions (ibid, p.20). *Sumida* forms another crucial node within the wider genealogical web of embodied play as shortly after the Dastés had invited Lecoq to join Les Comédiens de Grenoble the newcomer was asked to oversee the movement of the boat in this production which was his first experience of choreographing movement for performance (Lecoq 2006, p.98). Lecoq also explains that it was also through this encounter with the Dastés (and Bing's practice) that he first discovered mask work, and what I am terming one aspect of embodied play, which was 'an enormous moment' for him as an artist (ibid). This was to become central to his practice and approach to pedagogy. The later work of Lecoq is addressed well in existing literature, but this point of embodied exchange with Bing's strand of embodied play has not been discussed in adequate detail in relation to embodied play.

The work of Dasté and Decroux was also central to Barrault's practice. As is well documented (see Felner 1985, p.54) Decroux worked closely with Barrault on the development of his Corporeal Mime and the latter acknowledges that they owed much to Bing and her 'masque playing' (Barrault 1951, pp.21-22). Barrault and Decroux were also influenced by, and were in turn an influence on, Artaud (see Kurkinen 2000, pp.177-178). Importantly, Felner has argued that Barrault's production of *Numance* used what she defines as 'elements of Suzanne Bing technique' (what I am terming embodied extended play) passed on from Decroux, to choreograph a 'ballet of masks' (1985, p.96). Kurkinen also notes that Barrault was in close contact with Dasté whilst making *L'Autour*

*d'une mère* (2000, p.169) which drew on methods of embodied play that she was trained in, and had helped to develop, and significantly this production subsequently became retrospectively considered a seminal piece of early devised theatre (see Govan et al 2007).

Kurkinen's study led her to suggest that we could call Bing 'the mother of modern mime' (2000, p.89) and notes that her contribution has been historically neglected. Felner's analysis recognises how important what she terms 'Bing Technique' was to the development of various strands of mime practice (1985), but she reaches a less radical conclusion in historical and feminist terms than Kurkinen. This thesis expands this argument as the notion of imaginatively embodied, and extended, play is a much broader pedagogic and theatre-making principle and set of practices, which links to the development of mime, and mask work, but also the other aspects of her work. The way in which this genealogy has demonstrated the significance of lateral and collaborative relationships between Bing, Dasté and other artists, rather than vertical lines of ancestry, has also challenged the notion of the Quartet of French mimes (Decroux, Marceau, Barrault, Lecoq,) being a male network of artists as key catalysts in the twentieth century (see Felner 1985). This study has provided the analysis needed to support, and develop, the claim made by Frost and Yarrow (2007) that Bing should be recognised in relation to the development of what is now often termed Physical Theatres, Donahue's argument that her work be better considered in relation to various techniques, Kurkinen's call for a better study of the women involved in the development of 'mime' (2000) and Felner's early discussion of what she termed 'Bing Technique' (1985). This genealogical methodology has also revealed the hidden contributions of other women, namely Naumburg, Dasté and Howarth.

It is also crucial that we also acknowledge the genealogical trace of Bing's earlier work with embodied play within what is very often described in overly general terms as being Lecoq's form of *Le Jeu*, or Lecoq-based, in order not to continue to conceal aspects of her practice, and the significance of her contribution, under his later use and development of play. The dominance of

this view of play in the French tradition also panders to what Foucault (1977A) identifies as the desire to find a pure historical 'origin'. In the context of actor training this also feeds back into various power relations which centre around the notion of 'master-teachers' who can be seen to 'own' a 'pure' practice. Indeed as the thesis argues, this early form of play was transmitted and developed by a network of collaborators and in some respects should not be 'owned' by any one practitioner. The study demonstrates that the gender politics involved in these exchanges and developments during the twentieth century have led to the exclusion of Bing, Naumburg, Dasté and Howarth because of their gender, and we need urgently to consider this not only in relation to historical practice but with regards to the developments of embodied play and theatre being explored now.

## **5. Le Jeu into Embodied Play**

This simultaneous consideration of Bing and Chekhov's use of embodied play is unique and has therefore raised a number of crucial questions about the contemporary discourse around play. The thesis has developed the proposition that an expandable term of embodied play, and the related notion of an embodied play consciousness (rather than Yarrow's Neutral Consciousness 1986 or Evans' Active Consciousness 2009), may be more useful to historical critical scholarship and understanding of contemporary performance than continuing with a generalised use of Lecoq's term of *Le Jeu*. It also moves away from a term, which has hidden the contribution of a number of female practitioners in the twentieth century. As discussed in Chapter 3, Murray (2010) has acknowledged the differences in how Lecoq, Pagnuex and Gaulier work under the 'umbrella of play' (p.222) and this study now expands the analysis of embodied play to re-consider Bing's earlier work which although contributed greatly to Lecoq's practice is different from it, and Chekhov's quite different uses of play. The term embodied play would also allow for a more genealogical approach to various different actor training and theatre-making practices and would therefore also allow for a consideration of the points of divergence

between practices rather than attempting to unify them under a single and somewhat limiting notion of *Le Jeu*. This different term may also help to open up a critical space to consider the gender politics in the various different forms of embodied play and the different styles of play-enabling. McDermott has noted differences between styles of playing and play-enabling when comparing working with Keith Johnstone on improvisational play who, as noted previously, was inspired by George Divine who had been a student of Saint-Denis, who as we have seen drew heavily on Bing's forms of embodied play. He explains 'that was [Keith's] big thing: learning how to fail and be happy. I saw people really blossom in that workshop and I remember thinking specifically that there are some women who in a Gaulier/Lecoq context wouldn't be given that space' (2005, p.51). In this respect it is time to find a more flexible term that can be debated in practical and critical terms.

## **6. Embodied Theatre: Strands of Physical Theatres**

This study of the work of Bing, Chekhov, and their collaborators has provided a much needed detailed analysis of two strands of actor training and making practice that are covered by Murray and Keefe's (2007) expansive term of Physical Theatres. Due to the specificity of this project it also helps to clarify these selected strands of training and performance as Embodied Theatre in line with McDermott's suggestion. As has been demonstrated throughout the thesis, the use of this type of embodied play in actor training and making processes is markedly different to many of the post-modern/dramatic and persona-led practices that Murray and Keefe also include in their expansive term. At present the debate is stalled in that there is a general acknowledgement that the term of Physical Theatres is not helpful, but there is a lack of analysis exploring specific strands of practice that are often covered by this term. Zarrilli (2009) and Evans (2009) have been considering the relationships between various strands practices very well but from different perspectives to this analysis. This study adds a detailed analysis of the work of two artists, specifically in relation to embodied and transformational play which



is a core component of what I have termed embodied theatre, and has proposed a different type of genealogical methodology that could be used in relation to future studies of actor training.

## **7. The Politics of Embodied Play and Embodied Theatre**

There is currently debate about the absorption of devised practice into commercial British theatre in recent years and whether this has reduced the radicalism of this work (see Heddon and Milling 2006, Govan et al 2007, Mermikides et al 2010). However, it is crucial to note that in general larger commercial theatres tend to 'buy in' devised Physical Theatres, including embodied theatre, as end 'products' that are often 'authored' by individuals rather than changing their overall structures to facilitate and better acknowledge the collaborative nature of devised and in particular play-based making processes. However, this clearly returns us to the questions raised by a genealogy drawing on Foucault (1977A) and Feminist Historiography (Scott 1999) in relation to both gender politics and economics. As we have seen, Embodied Theatre developed through Embodied Play is anti-Individualistic and profoundly relational, i.e. it exists in a play between the different collaborators, the material and design elements, and the audience. It is process-led, more open and less determined than much of the work that still dominates the UK theatre economy. In Cixous' terms it is a more 'feminine' practice (2010). The value of the work comes from the relational exchanges, and it is hard, and ethically questionable, to locate an 'owner' of the final material. This practice turns directors in to 'play-enablers' and this raises questions about the traditional status associated to the role. This would indicate that there is still a debate needed on the ethics of larger theatre institutions 'buying-in' attractive end products without fully respecting the processes and ethics embedded in this work. As noted previously, Lloyd Newson argued in the 1990s 'You can't just get the product without changing the system' (in Tushingham 1994, p.50) but changes in the system have been patchy and slow over the past twenty years despite the popularity of Physical Theatres and Embodied Theatre. Sadly the

work of many female theatre practitioners also continues to be obscured in this process. The question then would seem to be whether the absorption into the mainstream has resulted in the perpetuation of the problematic gender politics and economics that this study explored in the early twentieth century? The continued demands for individual 'ownership' of work and the buying-in of final products would certainly indicate that this will obscure the work of many collaborators, particularly women. These issues are further complicated by the variety of ways of experiencing one's gender identity (which is no longer seen as something static or essentialist) and ongoing prejudices and discrimination in relation to ethnicity, social class, disability, sexuality and other components of identities.

As Evans (2009) notes, most teachers of Movement for Actors in UK drama schools are women and this remains an under-recognised area in which actors are often trained to engage with forms of embodied play. The practice-based delivery of devised theatre-making and embodied play in the UK in the University sector is also frequently delivered by women, often in less senior positions in their institutions. There are also male practitioners teaching forms of embodied play who, like Chekhov, are choosing not to follow the more patriarchal master-teacher patterns (Cornford, Dixon and McDermott) and are effectively enabling others in a different and possibly more 'feminine' way. It may be that this disadvantages them in relation to male colleagues operating in a different manner and their choices to work in this manner deserve to be considered in more detail.

This thesis therefore argues that the methods, and the overall principle, of embodied play still holds radical potential for training actors as creators of embodied theatre whether devised or based on pre-existing play texts and continues to present an alternative to much commercial theatre practice in relation to the dominance of play texts and the role of the director. However, it is evident that debate on the relationship between collaboratively produced devised and Embodied Theatre and the dominant theatre economy is urgently

needed. In the same way we can see a generalised use of 'theatre games' in a wide range of actor training programmes, but as this thesis has demonstrated, this cannot be correlated with an overall pedagogic and artistic practice based on embodied play, nor does it include the second stage of extending play to further empower the actor as a creator of embodied theatre. A debate on how and why these forms have often been left as something de-radicalised, in line with Saint-Denis' conservatism, is also needed in the UK context.

## **8. Quiet Radicals**

This genealogical approach has also unearthed the significant contributions of other important artists, including six women. In relation to the French genealogy this research has considered Naumburg, Dasté and Howarth. The analysis of Chekhov's practice has briefly touched on the connections with Boner, Straight and du Prey as they were better acknowledged by Chekhov and historical scholars. However, like Bing, none of these six women can be traced or understood in relation to an extensive canonical list of productions that they directed and in the case of the French strand they too have become largely invisible in terms of actor training histories. The danger of not embracing different approaches for historical studies of actor training, and devising, is that we continue to obscure, or ignore, the important contributions of artists who may not hold the overall status, directorial power and economic control but have made fundamental contributions to actor training, play-enabling/pedagogy, and theatre-making practices in the past, and indeed now. Further genealogical studies of embodied play would also allow for more detailed exploration of these other six women and could be expanded to consider other forgotten women, for example the methods developed by Littlewood and Newlove with their group of collaborators. This genealogical and feminist approach does not only have to apply to marginalised historical artists, but could also be used to better consider contemporary collaborative and devised practice where there is no singular owner of a theatrical 'product'. This is likely to be something that will be

increasingly needed in future years when trying to evaluate the practice of highly collaborative companies working in the twenty-first century.

This debate about both historical and contemporary practice, and the relationship between the two, is helpful as it retrospectively highlights the 'quiet', but profound, radicalism of Bing and Chekhov's use of play in actor training, their forms of play-enabling as pedagogues and directors, and the early forms of devised embodied theatre this led to. Their use of imaginatively embodied forms of play and their associated qualities, skills and attitudes, was innovative and brave. Their use of play clearly challenged existing conventions and approaches to hierarchy, established theatrical roles and styles of teaching and directing. Their embodied play practices fundamentally empowered the actor and whilst neither approach ever dismissed dramatic text, both provided the necessary space for embodied performance to signify on equal terms. An analysis of how play was central to Bing and Chekhov's methods of actor training enables us to better understand their quietly radical practice in the early part of the twentieth century. The use of embodied play in both Bing and Chekhov's practice also continues to inspire contemporary actor trainers and theatre-makers who in turn continue blend, challenge, and transform this work in an imaginative and appropriately playful manner.

## Appendix I: Training Pathways – Bing

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### Early experiments

Donahue notes that there may have been another experiment with actor training in the spring of 1916 undertaken by Copeau but that sadly there is little existent material on this. It is highly likely that Bing would have been involved in this work, if it took place, as she had been working with Copeau at the end of 1915 as discussed in Chapter 4. Donahue explains:

It was Copeau's intention to continue his work with the children through the spring of 1916 and then to [...] A journal entry dated "from the First to the 25<sup>th</sup> of January" indicates that he had indeed started working with a group of adults and that the number of children had increased to twenty-two (*Journal II* 7). No other evidence, however, remains about what transpired during those sessions in 1916, if indeed they ever took place...In effect, the "proto-school" of the Vieux-Colombier came to an end in the later winter or early spring of 1916.

(2001, p.68)

### Further context on the Vieux-Colombier School, Paris 1920-1924

Bing and Copeau were to continue to collaborate closely with various other artists when the Vieux-Colombier Theatre re-opened and the school started in 1920 with Bing's first programme which was deceptively called a class for young people in Diction but which was a very significant stage of her pedagogy in terms of developing methods of play, which will be addressed later. But by the time the company returned to Paris Dullin had left the Vieux-Colombier but Jouvet was still working with Bing and Copeau.<sup>1</sup> However, the disagreements that had arisen between Dullin and Copeau culminated with the former's departure from the company in the autumn of 1922 prior to the more radical and collaborative work that was to take place after the move to

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<sup>1</sup> Or according to Rudlin & Paul (1990) had been dismissed by Copeau (p.xvii).

Burgundy in 1924. However, despite the difficulties between these two men, Evans notes that Copeau effectively 'bequeathed' his Paris company and repertoire to Juvet (2006, p.30). Interestingly when he left Rudlin reports that '[d]espite the variety of work which he was doing at the Vieux-Colombier, Juvet had felt that he was "only doing Copeau"' (1986, p.84) and this perhaps reflected the way in which the 'Patron' was dominating what was, and had been, practice built on collaboration.

Between 1920 and 1924 Bing effectively stopped acting in order to focus on the development of the VC school. Despite the fact that Bing was acting as the major pedagogue at the time Copeau appointed Jules Romain as the 'director' when the school expanded in 1921. Records indicate that Romain did not contribute in a significant way to the school and Kusler argues that her research shows that 'Romain had little understanding in interest in acting' (1979, p.26) and that according to Marie-Helene Dasté 'he did very little work for the school, using his office and supplies there to do his own work and personal correspondence' (Kusler 1979, p.33). Predictably, when Romain was not rehired in 1923/24 instead of giving Bing the full credit she deserved in relation to her work at the school Copeau instead gave himself the responsibility for General Direction and Bing was listed as General Surveillance (teaching programme for 1923/24 cited in Kusler 1979, p.41). During these four years Bing was able to develop what I am terming her form of embodied play in different areas of her teaching with what became known as the apprentice group. As Kusler explains there were originally three divisions of students at the Paris school: A (over 12 years); B (over 18); and C. Bing and Copeau's main 'focus was particularly applied to the work done by the youngest group of students, those of Division A and some from Division B, whom Copeau and Mme Bing worked with in their class in Development of the Dramatic Instinct'. She goes on to claim that it 'was in this class that the most exciting, unifying, and instructive work of the year took place' (1979, p.30). In 1921 there were six students in Division A including Dasté and that the school records indicated that they had all taken classes the previous year. Jean Dasté originally attended the

school as an auditor and went on to join the apprentice group in 1922. There were eight students in Division B some of whom were simultaneously working as actors in the VC, including Jean Dorcy, Aman Maistre, Clarita Stoessel, Jean Villard, Jean Galland and M Iles Rousseau, Smith, Hecheren and Thierry. Kusler notes that the last four are not mentioned after 1922 and presumably left the school. Kusler cites Jacqueline Preville and Lucien Aguetand as having attended classes in Division C but otherwise there are no records available for this strand of their work (Kusler 1979, p.27).

As discussed in Chapter 4, Bing was using what I am terming her various methods of play in areas of the school syllabus from 1920 that were not necessarily entitled 'Games' and 'Improvisation' as they had been categorized in the 1916 prospectus document, but was rather teaching this under different course headings in the list of classes and courses 1920 onwards.<sup>2</sup> For example the initial class in Diction (1920-1921) and in Reading and Diction and Education of Dramatic Instinct (1921-1922). It was also in 1921 that they built on Bing and Dasté's earlier experiments with making mask, and their use of mask in Molière comedies and commedia farces produced by the VC, by introducing mask work into the actor training programme. Bing was binding and blending the various strands of the syllabus together. Kusler notes that the classes in dramatic theory and dramatic education were significant as she argues that Copeau's work with the students was a 'vital unifying element' (ibid) but, as she herself notes in her study, Copeau was not able to spend much time at the school and therefore Bing was delivering the majority of the teaching on this course. In the 1922-1923 programme Copeau and Bing focussed on the same areas as the previous year, but this time the description also includes mimicry and mask and no longer includes dance or singing. Once again it talks of developing, 'staging, using the techniques that the students are being trained

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<sup>2</sup> '8. Games [...] it is from games that we would like to construct, not a system, but an experiential education [...] At a certain meeting-point of gymnastics and natural play we will perhaps find the secret from which our method will spring up [...] Somewhere along the lines of improvised play, playful improvisation, improvised drama, real drama, new and fresh, will appear before us'. [...] 12. Improvisation. Improvisation is an art that has to be learnt... The art of improvising is not just a gift. It is acquired and perfected by study...And that is why, not just content to have recourse to improvisation as an exercise towards the renovation of classical comedy, we will push the experiment further and try to give new re-birth to a genre: the New Improvised Comedy, with modern characters and modern subjects'. (1916 prospectus document translated and cited by Rudlin 1986, p.44).

in' (Kusler 1979, p.34). Bing also taught a wide range of areas under the course entitled Diction (1922-1923): 'Mme Bing's activities with them in Diction focussed on analysis and reading of poetry, choral readings, fables, mimes, and verse plays, of which *Chunt du jeudi* was an example' (Kusler, 1979 p.37). It is also during this period that Bing enables and mentors the students in the apprentice group to use these extended forms of play in the generation of their own small scale productions, based on the techniques they are being taught as discussed in Chapter 5. There were challenges and changes in the school 1920 – 1924 including budget cuts and records indicate that it was Bing and Dasté who were responsible for practically re-designing the school teaching programme and that Bing spent considerable time integrating and relating the different aspects of the training, making it a 'whole' in Chekhov's terms, rather than disparate techniques that did not speak to each other. It would appear that even her teaching that explored very technical training was underpinned by embodied play.<sup>3</sup>

Despite Copeau's passionate belief in the importance of the school, he actually spent very little time teaching in Paris (Kusler 1979, p.90). In 1924 Copeau disbanded the company and moved, with Bing and a number of their actors and students, and his family to Burgundy. Copeau's decision to close the Paris theatre and to move to Burgundy has been considered from various perspectives. He unquestionably felt the strain of working within the constraints of commercial theatre and working in Burgundy clearly offered a fundamentally different process to their work in Paris, and previously in New York. However, Rudlin also notes that the failure of the production of Copeau's play *La Maison Natale* (December 1923) was 'probably one of Copeau's main reasons (though, by his own admission, he was not thinking rationally at the time) for calling a

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<sup>3</sup> Felner's analysis of the movement classes is noteworthy in that it demonstrates the way in which Bing was pulling together the different components of their training: 'The more advanced movement classes focused on the development of kinaesthetic awareness, mask work, improvisation, and stylized movement. The most basic of these was the course in kinaesthetic development taught by Mme. Bing that dealt with "notions of space and movement...force and duration, place, orientation, balance, lightness, heaviness, gentleness, elasticity, resistance, direction...obedience and independence...the musical sense' [Mime Journal]. Exercises were designed to make the student aware of "the feelings accompanying an action". To develop an inner sense of rhythm and phrasing, children's songs were sung and mimed with changes in rhythmic patterns and dynamics. The student would build to a crescendo and find the appropriate changes in movement to accompany the changes in voice and rhythm. Rhythm was used as a link among the actors as a means of uniting choral movement, and also served as a bridge to text' (Felner 1985, p.41). This also appears to be very similar to a number of Chekhov's different methods of play.



halt to the Vieux-Colombier experiment (1986, p.27). In addition to this, Rudlin suggests that there were also spiritual and religious motivations between Copeau's decision due to his conversion to Catholicism (ibid, p.83). It is hard to discern Bing's position on this move as there no records in English relating to this. However, regardless of Copeau's motivation for the move to Burgundy it certainly allowed the company to start to draw more explicitly on the forms of embodied play that Bing and her collaborators had been developing for a number of years for the making of what Copeau defined as their New Improvised Comedy leading to public popular performance which allowed for a freer play with the audiences themselves.

After the move to Burgundy in 1924 Bing was once again responsible for the training and carried with her many of the play enabling techniques and approaches she had developed in the previous years. When the initial experiment only lasted five months, a number of the artists decided to stay on and from 1 March 1925 a new organisation was formed which became known as LC.

## Appendix II: Training Pathways – Chekhov

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### Michael Chekhov Studio: Dartington Hall and Ridgefield

Chekhov established the CS at Dartington Hall which ran between 1936 and 1938. Chekhov arrived at Dartington in 1935 and started to prepare for the opening of the Studio. He designed a full three year training programme, although the studio only ran for two years at Dartington Hall. Daboo notes that the 'Studio opened in 1936 with a group of twenty to twenty-five students (the number is variable according to different lists)' (2012, p.68). She notes that the students came from Britain, America, Australia, New Zealand and two students who had worked with Chekhov in Latvia (ibid). He had originally hoped that the students would join a professional company with him after graduating from the full programme, but the reality was to be a different to this initial idea. Like Bing, Copeau and their colleagues, Chekhov had also designed a holistic training for the actor as an artist skilled in various different techniques and in different 'roles'. The notion of the actor as artist able to both interpret but also create and even write all fed in to the more extended forms of play that Chekhov was drawing on in his approach. Again, like the training at the VC and the later related schools, Chekhov's students were not taught only by him but were also introduced to other techniques by different tutors. For example, Alice Crowther was invited to teach Steiner's forms of Eurythmy and Speech Formation. Students were also taught specific skills such as acrobatics, gymnastics, fencing, dancing, musical composition and choral singing. Like Bing, Chekhov pulled together these various strands of training through the design and application of various projects. Crucially students also engaged in self-led performance making projects, some more successful than others. Concurrently Chekhov was training Straight and du Prey (and later Cutting) as teachers of his technique, as discussed in Chapter 5. Again, in a manner similar to the VC school, Chekhov also taught his students about a range of different historical and stylistic modes of performance and worked on a variety of play-texts. This

is also reflected in exercise 69 in *To The Actor* as Chekhov suggests that a group choose a theme for an improvisation themselves and then play it a number of times using styles, but this time 'having in mind different authors – as if it were a play by Shakespeare, Ibsen, Maeterlinck, or Molière, for instance'. He also notes that this same improvisation can be done in the style of a folk or fairy tale, or commedia dell'arte (1991, p.126-127). In this context it is interesting to note that the VC repertoire contained plays by all the writers that Chekhov suggests in this exercise.

However, during his time at Dartington Chekhov was not always pleased with the outcomes of the work at the CS, or his approach to the training and he revised his ideas in light of his experiences of teaching the first year of students, i.e. he was responsive to those he was working with. An important exemplar of this in relation to this study was the way in which he decided to introduce the second intake of students to 'improvisation' (and the basis of what I am defining as his overall method of play) at the very start of their training in contrast to the first year of the course where he had introduced this in a more focussed way later in the training.

In 1939 the studio moved to Ridgefield, Connecticut and as Black notes he simplified his approach to the training, 'it appears that the aims stated for the Ridgefield Studio were geared to attract and appeal to American actors. These aims were made more systematic and tangible than those at Dartington Hall' (1987, p.34). He also points out that Chekhov and his collaborators were now also in a different economic position:

At Dartington Hall there as no pressure to produce a product. This situation fostered much experimentation and allowed Chekhov to pursue aims that were not easily defined. The economic realities in America changed that, and the work at Ridgefield was geared toward developing a successful Broadway show that would produce revenues to help sustain the work at the Studio

(ibid, p.35)

In 1940 the Chekhov Theatre Players, a touring theatre company, was established by students of Chekhov's studio who had worked with him at Dartington.<sup>4</sup> Chekhov and his assistant/collaborator (and former student) George Shdanoff produced plays for their company. Chekhov stopped working on the East Coast in 1942 and in 1943 he moved to Hollywood where he acted in films but also managed to continue teaching until his death in 1955. In addition to a number of Chekhov's former students from the studio (including Straight, Hurst du Prey and Cutting), two of his later students Mala Powers and Joanna Merlin also helped to continue his practice after his death.

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<sup>4</sup> Chekhov also taught other actors in New York 1941-1942.

## Appendix III: Play and Professional Repertoire

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In addition to play forming an underlying principle connecting the methods of actor training, and at times the actual processes of theatre-making, developed by Bing, Chekhov and their collaborators, it can also be seen as something connected to the choice of repertoire for their respective schools/studios and also for their professional companies.

The VC's repertoire was evidently something that Copeau determined and it is difficult to know how much input Bing would have been able to have in this respect, but nevertheless the selection of certain modes of performance and styles clearly correlated with their development of embodied play.<sup>5</sup> Copeau's selection of material was, at times, compromised by financial factors and he was particularly dissatisfied with the impact that this had on the company's work in New York.<sup>6</sup> However, there were certain clear interests in Copeau's repertoire for the VC which reflected his interest in classical text and an interest in finding a new playwright that he would consider a 'man of the theatre' (Copeau 1990, p.144). Classical texts written by 'men of the theatre' included the work of Molière, Shakespeare and Aeschylus (i.e. writers who also worked as actors and/or with theatre companies). Copeau argued in 1932 that 'Molière is our perfect model because he is essentially an infallible *metteur en scène*, that is, a man whose imagination takes fire from the possibilities of theatre' (1990, p.143). It is significant that they launched the VC with a production of Molière's *L'Amour Médecin* in 1913 which ran alongside an adaptation of Heywood's early seventeenth century tragedy *A Woman Killed with Kindness* which Copeau adapted with Croué. Between 1913 and 1924 the company mounted six productions of Molière's plays which are listed 22 times

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<sup>5</sup> Between 1913 and 1924 'the Vieux-Colombier Theatre, under Copeau's direction, produced something in the region of 147 productions (including revivals) (Evans 2006, p.85).

<sup>6</sup> Rudlin argues that [...] Copeau's New York experiences had left him with a deep mistrust of the strings attached to unearned income and he had vowed never again to let himself be artistically compromised by financial considerations. (1986, p.83)

on the production chronology for the company produced by Rudlin (1986) as they were frequently revived. They featured in every season and Molière was the dominant playwright. The repertoire of LC (1925-1929) also included an additional two Molière productions along with adaptations from the work of Goldoni and Lopé de Rueda.

Molière's work drew heavily on the practice of Commedia dell'arte that originally developed in Italy but was to move across Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries which started as a folk form and utilises half masks, dance, music, physical lazzi, improvised and set dialogues and actions based on set scenarios.<sup>7</sup> The dominance of Molière's work in the repertoire certainly linked to the development of embodied play, creating a loop between the training in the school and the experiments that the actors undertook (including Bing and Copeau) in the professional productions. Molière wrote quite specific type of play text which is useful in highlighting Copeau's paradoxical relationship to the role of playwrights and the text. On the one hand Copeau held a commitment to the playwright's text and the notion that this should be respected. He states 'trouble arises the moment [the director] makes use of some of his professional skills to distort the playwright's work, to introduce into the fabric of that work his own ideas, intentions, fantasies and

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<sup>7</sup> A literal translation of *commedia dell'arte* is 'comedy of the artists'. 'Arte' in this context can also be translated as artistry, 'skill', 'craft', or 'know-how'. So *commedia dell'arte* was the comedy of professional artists rather than comedy performed by 'learned' or academic-amateurs. It was researched and re-discovered and transformed by George Sand et al in the mid nineteenth century. In 1846 Sand, her partner Chopin, and a number of other associates carried out a research project leading to a revival of a form of *commedia dell'arte* in France. Sand's son subsequently recorded their research in *The History of the Harlequinade* (1915), which was to become an important research source for twentieth century practitioners who were inspired by this playful mode of performance. Commedia dell'arte was to have a considerable impact on European theatre, over time becoming incorporated into the commercial theatre buildings and eventually being absorbed into (and being transformed by) text-based theatre (cf. the work of Molière and Goldoni). As Rudlin notes (1994) it is also important to acknowledge that *commedia dell'arte* was also influenced by the scripted *commedia erudite*, the scripted drama, of the same era, borrowing selected masks and scenario lines. Although there is evidence that the *commedia* troupes had very clearly defined practice methodologies that were often passed down within families, we have no extant written documentation or critical discussion from the practitioners themselves apart from some partial scenarios and notes. As Rudlin explains: 'During the sixteenth century in Italy, actors took pre-existing folk forms, improvised masking, music and dance and developed them into a theatrical medium. Over the next two centuries the performance techniques they developed were passed on highly selectively to their siblings and other younger members of their troupes as, virtually, professional secrets. There is a marked similarity with Japanese Noh in this respect' (1994, p.2). Interestingly after *commedia*'s popularity declined in the late eighteenth century many troupes were effectively de-institutionalised and returned to operating as modest travelling companies in Italy where the practice was scantily recorded. However, the influence of this form did not disappear or 'die' as is commonly assumed. Instead it appeared in transformed modes of performance such as Harlequinades, Punch and Judy puppet shows and as nursery figures. The development of Ballet, Molière's ballet-comédies and the English Masque all demonstrate an ongoing desire to blend both physical performance with the spoken word, mime and spectacle.

doctrines' (1990, p.125).<sup>8</sup> He also argued in 1938 that 'in all realisations [of a dramatic text], there exists a true way, the one the author took and the one it is our mission to find and follow' (ibid, p.127). But, at the same time, Copeau was clearly attracted to the playful and physical dimension of this work, which also requires from actors a more innovative and less reverential approach. Copeau (1921) was also attracted to what he describes as 'a 'scenic' principle in certain Molière plays' (1990, p.144) and he describes this as 'a constant movement which tends towards dance. There is a physical necessity made on the actor to be a dancer, feelingly to manifest this quality' (1990, p.144). Rudlin notes that their production of *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (which features Scapin, the Scappino of commedia dell'arte) was given in a presentational style that celebrated the theatricality of the play but which, he believes, also displayed a 'veneration for the text and the author' (1986, p.71-73).<sup>9</sup> But this ignores Copeau's ideas about Molière's plays requiring a 'joyous elasticity', which interestingly Copeau argues gives 'true creativity' to the actor (Copeau cited in Rudlin 1986, p73), i.e. a higher level of embodied play. To some extent this demonstrates the pull between the two poles of desire in Copeau's practice. Copeau's justification for working (playing) with objects that were not in the original text of *Scapin* and the company's use of his trèteau stage were that they were somehow admitted by the text (as discussed in chapter four) but to some extent this is simply the extension of embodied play with a text that calls for creative and actor-centred 'elasticity'. The level of actor-centred play needed for these texts perhaps inevitably resulted in a level of change or invention. Indeed Copeau writes in one of the programmes for the company's production of Molière's *La Jalousie du Barbouillé* in 1920 that:

we found ourselves starting to explore a very summary and free comical genre which, by giving back the actor the feel for his own resources and giving full reign to his inventive fantasies, would some

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<sup>8</sup> This is in marked contradistinction to Chekhov's perspective. Whilst he respected text, he took a different position: 'If there is any art of the theatre at all, it begins with acting and directing. The author and his play are not yet the theatre. Dramaturgy is independent of other arts; the theatre starts when the actors and directors take the script into their hands' (1991, p.77).

<sup>9</sup> There was an opening 'Impromptu' before the performance of *Scapin* in New York and a final crowning 'a solo dance-drama' around the bust of Molière *Le Couronnement de Molière*. Bing introduced the performance and the other actors then introduced themselves. Evans argues that the solo dance-drama was 'quite probably choreographed by Jessmin Howarth, and thus drawing on a mixture of Ancient Greek and Eurythmic references' (2006, pp. 111-112)

day make him rediscover a little of that professional joy that we no longer see except with the circus clowns or the music-hall 'fantasies' (1990, p.151)

The fact that the VC (and LC) repertoire contained a large number of classical plays also enabled an exploration of a broader range of performance styles and modes in some, if not all, of their productions.

The repertoire of work that Chekhov directed after his departure from Russia was, at times, selected in response to various financial difficulties and commercial pressures, in a manner not dissimilar to Copeau. His exploration of clowning, as a very specific mode of play, in *Skid* is addressed in the thesis, as is his work with the Habima on Shakespeare's comedy *Twelfth Night* (which Copeau and Bing were also to produce with the latter giving an acclaimed performance as Viola).<sup>10</sup> To some extent, the period of time after working with the Habima and until he arrived at Dartington, Chekhov was on the whole obligated to remain within his former Russian repertoire with the exception of *The Castle Awakens* that he developed with Boner. Chekhov's autobiography notes dissatisfaction with a number of the 'under-rehearsed' productions that he mounted in his two seasons in Paris.<sup>11</sup> In June 1931 he staged *Erik XIV*, *The Flood*, *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet* and *An Evening of Anton Chekhov's Stories* at the Atelier Theatre. Following this he was to work on the experimental but not entirely successful production of *The Castle Awakens*. Kirillov explains that following this show Chekhov and his collaborators gave multiple performances of the *Anton Chekhov Evening* which included new adaptations including one entitled *A Witch* in addition to *The Flood*. Whilst in Latvia and Lithuania (1932-1934) he mounted a variety of works also mostly taken from his Russian repertoire: *Erik XIV*; *Ivan the Terrible*; *Hamlet*; *Twelfth Night*; *Village of Stepanchikovo*; *The Government Inspector*, and also the opera *Parsifal*. This was followed the tour to the United States produced by Sol Yurok which included performances of *The Government Inspector* in Paris and Brussels and again in America (February 1935) along with *The Flood*, Anton Chekhov

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<sup>10</sup> Chekhov also performed in Max Reinhardt's productions of *Jusik* in 1929 and *Phaea* in 1930.

<sup>11</sup> Kirillov notes that Chekhov's biography tends to confuse his first and second seasons in Paris 2005, p.224



Evening, performances of soliloquies from *Crime and Punishment*, *Hamlet* and *Ivan the Terrible*.

Chekhov's period of time running the Chekhov Studio at Dartington Hall allowed him the freedom to select a variety of texts for the students and the Fairy Tale Company. This related to the fact that there was no requirement to produce large scale public performances whilst the studio was at Dartington. However, in addition to the various experiments with fairytales, scenarios and collaboratively written/created projects using extended play they also staged *Peer Gynt*, *The Lower Depths* and *A Midsummer's Night Dream* at the studio. However, as Black points out (1987), this changed after the move to the United States when they had to develop a Broadway show to generate income for the studio. The development of the Studio's production of *The Possessed* (1939), although bravely experimental, had mixed reviews and a run of only one month. In response to this reaction Chekhov decided against his original hope of producing an adaptation of Dicken's *Adventures of Samuel Pickwick* on Broadway and instead prepared the company to tour. The first tour in 1940 included *Twelfth Night* and *The Cricket on the Hearth*. In 1941 they added *King Lear* and in 1942 the last run by the Chekhov Studio was a series of one-act performances that were adapted from stories by Anton Chekhov (which had been previously performed by the Moscow Arts Players). In 1946 he re-staged *The Government Inspector* for the Lab Theatre before his death.

## Appendix IV: Play and Autocours

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Schechner suggests that “play acts” can be measured against six templates, although he points out that there is considerable overlap and interplay between them: 1) Structure; 2) Process; 3) Experience; 4) Function; 5) Ideology; 6) Frame (or net) (1993, p.25). In his publication, Zarrilli identifies what he argues are the shared preoccupations of psychophysical acting and identifies six primary psycho-dynamic elements of what he perceives as this practice. These include (i) a notion of awakening energy in the actor; (ii) the attunement of body and mind into a whole (or in Zarrilli’s terms a gestalt); (iii) a heightening of both inward and external awareness; (iv) attending to specific actions/tasks assiduously with primary focus; (v) doing and being done (the actor does the action/task while simultaneously being done by the same action/task); (vi) inhabiting dual/multiple consciousness (2009, p.83). Whilst these six categories are useful in relation to the practice of both Bing and Chekhov (and will be considered later in the study) and the way in which Zarrilli has broadened this category to consider the French tradition is helpful, there are significant differences between the work that he carries out as a practitioner and that of the case study artists. Zarrilli’s technique is primarily concerned with the use of yoga and Asian martial arts and therefore is not looking specifically at the transformational practices of the character actor. There are also a number of critical frames built into Zarrilli’s perspective which he has developed in relation to his own very specific practice which may not necessarily be useful in the context of this study.

This pedagogic strategy of student-undertaking self-led learning that leads to the development of small-scale performance employed by Bing and Chekhov can also be seen as important forerunner to Lecoq’s system of ‘autocours’ where students teach themselves regularly in their training. Murray (2003) explains Lecoq introduced autocours during, and arguably in response

to, the student rebellions of 1968 in Paris and that it subsequently became a core part of his pedagogical approach. Bing and Chekhov had been in turn inspired by Jaques-Dalcroze who used these systems of self-led learning and also progressive pedagogues such as Naumburg/Montessori and Steiner respectively as discussed in Chapter 2.

## Appendix V: Chekhov's World of Gesture and Archetype

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It was during the period of recuperation after ill health in Latvia that Chekhov started to articulate a much broader and more complex understanding of gesture which is directly related to what I am terming his methods of embodied play. Chekhov explains his ideas about Gesture:

So it was that my attention was gradually drawn to phenomena in which rhythm was manifest. Lying in the garden on bright, sunny days, I observed the harmonious forms of the plants, I imagined the process of the rotation of the Earth and the planets, I searched for harmonious compositions in space and gradually came to the experience of the movement, invisible to the external eye that was present in all phenomena in the world. There even seemed to me to be such movement in motionless, solidified forms. It was movement that had created form and still maintained it. When I observed it, it was as if I were witnessing some creative process: whatever I looked at seemed to be in the process of coming into being before my very eyes. I called this invisible movement, this play of forces, 'gesture'. Finally I began to notice that they weren't merely movements, but that they were filled with content: they manifested will and feelings that were of a diverse, profound and exciting nature [...] By this stage, I no longer just spoke of 'gesture' (i.e. the form and direction of the movement), but also of its 'qualities' (ideas, feelings and will). I started to search for 'gestures' not only in nature, but also in works of art...When I then performed 'gestures' that I myself had created, they invariably called forth feelings and will-impulses inside me and gave rise to creative images

(2005, p.187)

He then explains how this clearly relates to his approach to acting, and theatre-making:

I then turned my thoughts to using 'gesture', which has such a powerful effect on the psyche in the theatre, and I realized that every play, every stage character, costume, set, mise-en-scene, speech (expressed through the gestures of Eurythmy) – in a word, everything that the audience sees and hears on stage can be expressed as a living, evocative 'gesture' with its attendant 'qualities'.

(ibid, p.188)

In this context Chekhov suggests that the term 'gesture' covers what we might generally call gesture, action and movement (1985, p.107).

Arguably this complex conception of gesture in "everything" was to become one of the cornerstones of his approach as du Prey's comments highlight:<sup>12</sup>

Chekhov was fascinated by the world of gesture, gesture in everything – a plant, a tree, a chair. He gave us a wonderful lesson on the gestures to be experienced in different flights of stairs. The actor must become aware of these things so that every moment on the stage he is alive with this sense of gesture. He never makes a gesture that isn't completely and utterly significant. Chekhov felt the actor had to live in a whole realm of gesture.

(du Prey 1983, p.85)

Significantly in the context of this cross-fertilised genealogy, du Prey also makes the important connection between Chekhov's interest in Gesture and other theatre practitioners:

He wasn't alone, Meyerhold was deeply involved in gesture, as was Vakhtangov and a number of others. Perhaps it goes back to Delsarte and Dalcroze. Chekhov greatly admired the ideas of Dalcroze<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, Chekhov himself worked with Rudolf Steiner's gestural principles, which he called eurhythm.

(1983, p.85)

Kirilov also argues that Gesture is not only one of the central aspects of his technique, but also what helps to integrate or synthesise the various different methods: 'for Chekhov, gesture is the common denominator on which various aspects of acting such as speech, movement, psychology, etc. can be integrated and unified into the 'whole picture' (2005, p. 227).

Chekhov's ideas about rhythm were also very connected to this broad notion of gesture in a manner reminiscent to Bing.<sup>13</sup> Du Prey recalled that in

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<sup>12</sup> For Chekhov this is linked to his belief that humans being have ideas/thoughts, feelings/emotions and will impulses (1985, p.28).

Chekhov's teaching '[...] always, rhythm, rhythm, rhythm, rhythm. Up to the very end of his work, rhythm was all important to him. The rhythm of an idea, the rhythm of a concept, the rhythm of the whole [...] Gesture and rhythm, so close. The living force. Not metre, of course. We worked with metre, and metrical rhythm, but he meant the inner rhythm of the whole thing, the scene or whatever it was' (1978, pp.14-15)

## **Archetypal Gesture and Essence**

As discussed in Chapter 5, the use of what might be termed archetypes, prototypes, or types of movement / gesture and character were to become central to various techniques that Chekhov developed. Chekhov argued that in order for the actor to find the 'individual and unique character' they have to work through (or play with) the archetype (1985, p.114). This notion of archetype or prototype is related to certain expressive gestures by Chekhov and it useful to quote Exercise 20 at length to consider this in more detail. He advises actors to:

Train yourself to make certain Gestures with the utmost expressiveness, as fully and completely as you can. These gestures might express for instance: drawing, pulling, pressing, lifting, throwing, crumpling, coaxing, separating, tearing, penetrating, touching, brushing away, opening, closing, breaking, taking, giving, supporting, holding back, scratching. You can produce each of these gestures with different qualities: violently, quietly, surely, carefully, staccato, legato, tenderly, lovingly, coldly, angrily, cowardly, superficially, painfully, joyfully, thoughtfully, energetically [...] Your movements of pulling, pressing, tearing and others, must maintain a pure, ideal, archetypal form. Unnecessary complication and acting additions will weaken the results of this exercise.<sup>14</sup>

(1991, p.41)

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<sup>13</sup> Like Bing and Copeau, Chekhov was also interested in Jacques-Dalcroze's work and there are notes on a lecture he gave in London in 1937, and how he argues rhythm is based on the three inter-related elements of time, space and energy, held in the archives (MC/S1/21).

<sup>14</sup> Ashpenger discusses the basic psychological gestures passed down by Jack Colvin and Joanna Merlin, some of which were not written down. She notes that these include push, pull, open, embrace, wring, lift, tear, close, hit (2008, p.320 appendix II).

Chekhov explains that by engaging with (or expressively playing with) these gesture actors will 'revive' their bodies and imagination so that when they later produce smaller scale gestures they will keep this level of creative engagement and related body memory (ibid, p.42), indeed they can just be done in the imagination. He feels that this work with Gesture helps the actor to 'get to the core, the very heart and essence of character' (1992, cassette1). Chekhov's ideas about archetypal gesture also correlates to Bing and her collaborators' use (and transformation of) Hébert's natural gymnastics which explores a similar focus on core movements/Gestures such as pushing, pulling, climbing, walking, running, jumping, lifting, carrying, attacking, defending and swimming.

Chekhov, like Bing and Copeau, believed that these playful and expressive Gestures, and their related movement qualities and rhythms, can stimulate the actor's 'inner world', i.e. trigger psychophysical sensations. He suggests: 'Let these sensations sink into your body as the first psychological qualities to be absorbed' (Chekhov 2002, p.6). As discussed in Chapter 5, Chekhov's use of Psychological Gesture was something which flourished due to a level of cross-fertilisation in Russia, then fused with other influences, and I would argue the underlying use of play. Gordon describes how the way in which Chekhov discovered the King's character in Vakhtangov's *Erik IV* (1921) was also '[i]nspired by the lessons of Eurythmy' and that he found this role by 'experimenting with the shape and quality of the character's movements and rearrangements of his body size' (1985, p.15). However, in addition to Gesture as a playful method for exploring the 'inner world' of a character, including their main desire or objective, Chekhov also proposed a radical extension of this work in relation to non-human forms and this is important in the context of embodied play. In exercise 19 he advises actors to: "Start with simple observations. Look at, or imagine, forms of different plants and flowers. Ask yourself, "What Gestures do these forms conjure before me?" Combine them also with Qualities' (1991, 39). He argues that '[e]ach leaf, stone, rock, remote mountain range, cloud, brook, wave, will speak to us about Gestures and Qualities that are contained in them' (ibid, p.40) clearly correlating to Bing and

her collaborators use of embodied play. He also argues that we can see different Gestures and the 'interplay of powers, and qualities in staircases (steep or sloping), in doors, in windows (narrow, low, high, broad, or square), in pillars, walls, corners, etc' (1991, 40). They can also be forms such as triangles or images.

## **Gesture and Sensations and Feelings**

This notion of Gesture and archetype correlates to Chekhov's belief that in general people's experiences are forgotten and become part of their 'subconscious', becoming transformed into sensations. When a performer wants to access emotions it is these sensations that they access in a playful way through this expressive use of Gesture and qualities. He argues:

All our private, subjective, particular life experiences having been altered, amalgamated, summarised, purified, condensed by our subconscious wisdom become archetypes, prototypes of feelings and these archetypes we call sensations and only these sensations, these prototypes can we experience immediately, directly, spontaneously

(1992, cassette 3)

Chekhov argues that 'every moment something is disappearing and transforming' and he points that that 'When I am very tortured by someone or something, I am not objective about it – it is me, me, me. When I forget it, the same pain becomes richer and I am objective about it. I can use it for my part' (1985, pp.101-102). In Chekhov's opinion this is a more creative and psychologically safer way for the actor to use herself. However, like Bing and Copeau (and Naumburg), he believes these methods can only be used effectively if 'we discard all our habits, and let our individualities respond to whatever we choose [...] You will see that nothing will be lost if you will somehow switch off your old habits' (ibid, p.71).

Psychological Gesture becomes a way of discovering the 'essence' of a character in a single full-body gesture, indeed Chekhov often refers to it as the



'spine' of a character, and the related sensations. The notion of seeking the 'essence' of something in gestural form, i.e. in a character type, something in nature, a form of some kind, a tree etc. can also be seen in Bing's work. Waldo Frank [Naumburg's husband] claimed that '[t]he pupils of Copeau are taught to articulate what might be called the Platonic essence of a tree, an animal, an ocean' (Frank cited in Kusler 1979). The Psychological Gesture can be used for an actor's understanding of the role in the entire play, or for different scenes/sections. Many of the diagrams provided in publications show Psychological Gestures as abstract, archetypal movements. Although these Psychological Gestures were an expressive movement which stirs the imagination and related sensations, often of an abstract nature, explored during the training and rehearsal process, this movement would often be internalised and sometimes not retained as gesture/movement in the final performance. However, once (or if) the Psychological Gesture becomes invisible the character still retains this in her or his 'body memory' and their 'mind's eye' and speaks in accordance with it. In terms of the work that Chekhov advised actors to carry out on their character's objectives it is also important to highlight the significant difference between the way in which he advocates actors discovering these through an engagement with his methods rather than an intellectual, or table-based, process. Chekhov argues that the '[o]bjective [...] captured by the intellect cannot be of use to the actor (1991, p.108). Instead he suggests a different way:

Act spontaneously several times, then as yourself ask, "What have I done? What was I aiming at?" This is to search for the Objective by appealing to one's Will. Here again, before knowing what the Objective is, we experience it. While freely acting so many moments or scenes, the actor must keep a "spying eye" upon himself. Whether the answer comes while you are acting or afterward, it will arise from the realm of your Will, avoiding the sphere of your intellectual reasoning.

(1991, p.109)

Indeed he designed the playful Psychological Gesture as a way of intuitively finding, using and refining a character's objectives (1991, p.111).

## **Gesture as Synthetic Embodied Analysis**

Chekhov explains that his methods enable artists to interpret 'everything which is going on while [...] rehearsing on the stage, as gesture or action, or movement. Whichever term we wish to use. Under the term gesture, perhaps we will understand everything I am going to tell you. Everything can be turned into a gesture with qualities' (1985, p.107). When working on a scene at the Studio and exploring Psychological Gesture, Chekhov gives the following suggestions: 'A gesture for everyone of softness and great sorrow. Gesture of burying a beloved child. Gesture of tension. Gesture of close embrace – static-very, very, very hot and intimate. The gesture of close embrace is one of a dead point – it is static' (du Prey's records 1978, cited in Theatre Papers, pp.24-25). Chekhov uses gesture in this way to explore a character's action, psychological state, an entire scene, a dynamic exchange, whether explored inwardly, outwardly or both concurrently, and objective atmosphere. He argues: 'If we are producing these gestures, then we are accumulating, like a magnet, all the big and small particles which are coming to us, because we are occupied in these gestures, therefore, our talent is freed to such an extent that it will not remain silent, but will speak immediately as soon as we do not sit upon it and squeeze it out' (Chekhov 1985, p.110). The work of Petit is useful in terms of considering the way in which contemporary practitioners are using, and transforming, Chekhov's use of gesture as a form of synthetic analysis (2010, p.14).

## Appendix VI: Bing's Embodied Mask Play

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### Character mask

Following the early experiments in mask-making with Dasté whilst the company was in Morristown Bing was to play in different ways with mask in her approach to actor training, and extended play, which eventually led to the making of public productions in LC and CQ. The VC company had also been experimenting with commedia dell'arte inspired characters in their Molière productions for many years. Copeau's description of how the mask works is particularly useful in the context of embodied play and is therefore worth quoting at length:

The virtue of the mask is [...] convincing. It symbolizes perfectly the position of the interpreter in relation to the character, and demonstrates how the two are fused one to the other. The actor who plays under the mask receives from this object of cardboard the reality of the character. He is commanded by it and obeys it irresistibly. Barely has he shed the mask, when he feels pouring out of himself a being of which he was unaware, that he did not even suspect existed. It is not only his face which is altered, but his being, the character of his reflexes where feelings are being formed which he would have been incapable of imagining with his face uncovered...even the accent of his voice will be dictated by the mask – a persona – that is to say a personage without life as long as it is unwedded to the actor, which came from without, yet seizes him and substitutes for the self.

(Copeau cited by Felner 1985, p.43)

Leabhart (2004) argues that the actors working with Bing and Copeau on these experiments with mask had distinct and non-everyday embodied experiences. Whilst not supporting Leabhart's claim that this work was a form of shamanic practice, a consideration of the different types of experience, and the metaphors used by the actors that Leabhart reports on, seem significant in relation to the ways in which embodied play seems to operate. The discussion about divided/dual consciousness and the way in which actors need to allow themselves to be 'led' by various game or rules for play has been discussed in

Chapters 3 and 4 and can equally relate to these ideas about playing with mask. Leabhart notes that Jean Dasté had used the metaphor of being 'possessed' by the mask, Dullin wrote of experiencing 'an altered state of consciousness', Dorcy talks of feeling in a 'trance' and 'Copeau writes of a character who 'comes from outside, takes hold of [the actor], and replaces him' (Leabhart 2004, p.317). He also cites Dasté's reflections 'that meditation or contemplation was the act of taking time to put on the mask and collect one's thoughts, to free one's self for the influence of the mask' (ibid). In this instance the character mask provides its own set of rules for the play that the actor then follows. In this context it is not simply a question of the actor deciding to try to lessen the grip of their everyday self, but rather it is the imaginatively embodied engagement with the mask (like another hypnotic toy) that enables a shift, or a jump, into a different form of what I am terming embodied play consciousness.

### **Noble Mask**

Rudlin describes how Copeau first used what they termed the noble mask:

Copeau became aware of the potential of the mask, both in actor training and, ultimately, in performance during his visit to Craig. It made its appearance in his work almost by accident – whilst rehearsing a scene at the View Colombier he despaired of an actress who found herself repeatedly physically blocked during a scene and unable to move [...] Copeau took his handkerchief and covered her face, noting that her body was immediately released an expressive instrument. It was her face which had been making all the effort. This experiment was immediately put to work in the School, using stockings as well as pieces of cloth.

(2000, p.72)

Following a period of time using fabrics to cover the actors' faces, Bing and Copeau's students made their own masks, based on their own features but 'neutralised' to some extent. The use of the noble mask related to Copeau and Bing's ideas about a type of neutral state involving relaxation but also energised readiness and openness, along with the ability to channel energy in highly imaginative and embodied ways. It also supported the actors in lessening their own habitual psychophysical patterns and therefore created space for more efficacious playful transformation. Rudlin explains that this work was described

by Bing as working on the 'pre-formation of the expressive idea' (2000, p.29). Whilst Chekhov did not work with exactly the same concept of neutrality (although he uses the term to refer to a less self-based, and less expressive state, for the actor 2002), his forms of play did touch on similar principles, such as actors needing to find a state of energized readiness:

The process of sustaining is something which follows our action, speech, etc., but there is another process of sustaining which precedes it, and is just as important. Before I ask, "What", I must already start. Before I speak I must start inwardly, not at once, abruptly and dryly. This we can also do with the gesture. Every little word, or sound, or long speech and business is thus framed by something which is purely an artistic thing which is in the air that gives life to everything we do on stage. Without this proceeding and following air or space all things are dry and dead.

(1985, p.63)

For Chekhov the terms were different but the combination of working with a sense of Ease with an ability to Radiate one's energy in various subtle ways, in combination with what he defines as Openheartedness and the capacity to both give and receive, within the context of non-self-based acting (i.e. less habitual), creates a state which is similar if not the same to Bing's idea of neutrality.

The masked play that Bing developed, blended with other forms of play, and extended, developed her work significantly. Rudlin's account (2000) demonstrates how her students continued to play using masks. He explains they worked with: intuitively felt physical positions and movements; work with the five senses and imaginary objects; sensations, simple actions and 'emotions'. Later they explored the embodiment of abstract and 'moral' ideas. Rudlin's account of how Bing and Copeau's students worked with 'intuitively felt physical positions' interestingly mirrors some of Chekhov's play with Gesture. For example, words or phrases were called the students would let the mask 'attack' (take over, or lead) moving into a physical position that expressed the actors' interpretation of this word. They held this embodied state for a short period and then returned to a more neutral stance. However, one of the central differences is that Bing and Copeau's students would move into these positions in slow motion whereas Chekhov's similar forms of play explored a range of

rhythms (i.e. staccato / legato). Similarly the way in which forms of Bing's play included actors exploring a simple emotion being combined with a basic activity (Rudlin 2000, p.73) mirrors the way in which Chekhov's students would work with movement quality to trigger sensation/emotion (see Chekhov 2002) and combine this with a simple activity. In this masked form of play students were also encouraged to 'physically represent inanimate objects' (ibid, p.74) and whilst the stylistic representation was different, this central idea is similar to Chekhov's practice of students playing to find a Fantastic Psychological Gesture for inanimate objects, or forms (2002). In addition to working in silence Bing and Copeau's students also started to explore non-verbal sounds which were later turned into grummelotage. This was then used in the work of CQ and was to influence Obey's approach to writing.

The neutral mask was developed later developed by Jean Dasté and Jacques Lecoq based on Copeau and Bing's work earlier work and experiments with the noble mask (Rudlin 2000, p71). Wright explains that 'For Copeau the noble mask gave the actor the stillness and confidence to complete a movement. Lecoq's neutral mask takes this idea further; Sartori created a mask that has neither a history nor a future but lives simply in the moment, without comment' (Wright in Chamberlain & Yarrow 2002, p. 75). However, Lecoq argued there is 'no such thing as absolute and universal neutrality' (2000, p.2), rather he notes that is rather a 'temptation'. However he notes that whilst it might be a metaphoric desire this does not lessen the efficacy of it as a creative tool which lessens the socialized and habitual. As Eldredge has pointed out, the leather masks sculpted by Sartori for Lecoq's school 'are wonderful masks, but they have become increasingly questionable in our multicultural age because their physiognomy immediately signals their European heritage' (Eldredge 1996, p.49). He also points out that trying to sculpt a neutral mask is 'an impossible task' as '[n]o one Neutral Mask is appropriate for everyone in our diverse culture' (ibid). Felner argued that many of Lecoq's 'exercises' were based on those originally developed by Copeau and Bing (1985, p.159).

## Nō Theatre

As Chapter 5 has demonstrated, Bing also played extensively with Japanese Nō Theatre. To better consider the correlation between this strand of her embodied play, and her various experiments at extending play, it is useful to consider Kurkinen's description of the core elements of *Kantan*.

The play is a simple story based on a Chinese fable, about a young man, Rosei, who is on his way to the world. He stops at an inn, falls asleep on a sage's magic pillow which in a dream shows him how his life is going to turn out. He wakes up and concluding that all worldly success is futile, returns to his home village.

(2000, p.81)

She notes that the author made the following changes to the story and cites Waley (1983): ' [t]he "sage" is eliminated, and in the dream Rosei immediately becomes Emperor of Central China. This affords an excuse for the court dances which form the central "ballet" of the piece. In the second half ...the words are merely an accompaniment to the dancing' (Kurkinen 2000, p.81). She describes the plot that Bing was to use:

First we are introduced to the hostess of the inn who informs about the location and the magic of the pillow. Rosei enters, the hostess goes off to cook a meal. Rosei falls asleep. In his dream he is fetched to the palace by an envoy and two attendants carrying a litter. Then the chorus describes the splendours of the palace where he enters. Also a boy dancer is present on stage, but he does not start dancing until later, in the scene in which Rosei has already reigned fifty years and celebrates with his court. The boy's Dream-dance inspires Rosei to dance the *gaku* or Court Dance while having a dialogue with the Chorus. Rosei wakes up, has his final dialogue with the Chorus which urges him to turn back home. The play is over'

(2000, p.82)

What is clear is that the story structure, or frame, is not dissimilar to those Bing (and Chekhov) explored in various folk and fairy tales. It is also distinctly non-Naturalistic and includes a chorus which requires relational play by the ensemble. Rudlin notes that in this form of performance 'the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts' (1986, p.62) which again relates to Bing's overall approach and Chekhov's notion of The Whole. Rudlin also claims that in

Nō 'feeling that would be seen as melodramatic if realistically expressed, can be finely perceived' (Rudlin 1986, 62) and this would certainly relate to both the non-Naturalistic style and the way in which actors work with their own ego, presence and energy in a different manner to self-based psychologising techniques.

Kurkinen's analysis of the reaction to the CQ production is also useful in this context, she explains:

[...] the show was fairly well received, but [the critics] comments regarding the style of the piece are of particular interest: '[...] there were complaints about the actors being reduced to the role of simple mimes, and even fear, that replacing action by commentary reflected a desire to see the death of the theatre. As in [Compagnie des Quinze's later production of] *Noé*, the mimic skills of the actors were praised and, occasionally, acting was compared to dancing or ballet. Pictures of the production show that mime techniques were used to portray actions. For example, *Lucrèce* is shown to spin without any props. According to French critics, the role of *Lucrèce* was a personal triumph for Marie-Hélène Dasté, and the British critics joined the praises in June 1931, when the play was presented in London.

(2000, p.184)

### **Gender and changes in approaches to mask work**

When the company moved to Burgundy and started to develop their mask characters for use in the extended play that led to some of the work of LC, they developed a much more individualistic approach to the training in contrast to the very ensemble based practice that they had used at the Paris school. Kusler notes that in this new way of working; '[n]one of the women in the group seemed to have much success in developing a character improvisationally' (1979, p.64). Baldwin cites Suzanne Maistre having recalled 'that the women were so busy fabricating costumes, they lacked the necessary time' for this work (2003, p.28). Baldwin herself wonders if the lack of female characters in *Commedia dell'arte* was also problematic, although this is debatable.



## Appendix VII: Fairy tales and Folklore

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Interestingly in the archives there is also a list of books recommended to be obtained which includes: Chinese Folklore, Welsh Fairy Tales, Japanese Fairy Tales, and Folklore of the Jews, North American Indian Fairy Tales and Legends etc. This indicates a particular interest in cross-cultural study (Kester B, MC/S5/4). Chekhov also discusses character types or representations found in fairy and folk tales in relation to clowning:

There can be one or many of these pixies, gnomes, elves, brownies, trolls, nymphs or other “good folk” of that species who take possession of the clown, who make us feel he is not quite a human being [...] They must enjoy their temporary right to use the clown’s human body and psychology for their games and tricks. You will find incalculably rich material for creating such “good folk” in genuine folk-fairy-tale literature. They will stir your imagination’

(2002, pp. 128-129)

The theme of transformation, like that often featured in fairy and folk tales, is also used in one of his exercises (number 8). He suggests that the actor ‘[i]magine events of mobility and transformation: a castle transforming under a spell, a poor beggar woman turning into a witch, a princess becoming a spider’ (1991, p.12).

### **Selected materials from MC Archive**

#### **Series five: Fairytale and Folklore. 1937-1938 Fairy Tale Theatre Committee**

#### **Example of the index to Folklore Analysis - File ‘A’: Abducting (2)**

“Tsar Saltan” (Abducting child)  
“The Fatherly Inheritance”  
“Ramayana” (p.58 - )  
“The Mahabharata” p.135  
“The Dead Man’s Thanks”  
“THE BAMBOO CUTTER AND THE MOON MAIDEN”  
“STAR KNIGHTS”

"TONETTO BUSETTO"  
(MC/S5/1])

**Outlines and a script for 'The Mother'**

**A fairy tale based on a theme by Hans Christian Anderson developed and scripted by MC and Hurd Hatfield (1940)**

"The Mother", Fairy Tale – based on a theme by Hans Christian Anderson  
Ridgefield, Conn. Jan 31, 1940

(Extracts from Chekhov's notes on the project for children)

The work on this Fairy Tale will be a little bit different from the work on other plays. We will elaborate it together – as a group we must create it as a performance – we must draw the settings and the costumes. We must approach it from the point of view of imagining it on the stage. We must be concerned about everything which has to do with it – not only with our own part.

The idea to create fairy tales has been in my mind for over fifteen years, but only if they are exceptional performances because of their atmosphere around them and this great experienced knowledge. [...] If you give the children the possibility of breath behind the fairy tale it will be a real breath for them.

(MC/S5/4)

Characters that feature in the play: MOTHER, her child dies, DEATH, NIGHT DAWN, OLD WOMAN (half way place), (Flowers / greenhouse).

DEATH

[...] When Death says "I am always walking, walking, walking over the earth" he means he never stops walking, moving. Therefore it is very important to know how he walks over the stage – how he makes accents on the earth so each moment will be rhythmic. Try to elaborate Death's feet which may be very big and soft [...]

(MC/S5/4)

Night: Woman... I am the night. The Death has been in your room. I saw him with my hundred eyes. I saw him walking through the snow, carrying the child away, bearing it deep into the wood. I know his coming and going. I know. I am the night.

(MC/S5/4)

## Appendix VIII: The Fisher's Scene

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Imagine a fishing village in an imaginary place. Imagine the families living in this little village. Try to imagine the people and especially the strange psychology of such people who have always to deal with the sky, with the pictures which rise on the horizon. Each wind has a special meaning for them. They must listen to the changes of the wind in a special way, in order to read their meaning: which wind is bad, which is not so bad, and which is bringing tragedy. The meaning of each cloud. Try to imagine this kind of life. Then try to imagine the fishermen who went to sea but have not come back.

Two days and two nights the families of these fishermen have been waiting and waiting, in vain. In storm, and wind, and rain, for two days and nights. Almost without hope. Try to look along the coast and see the wives and children, and the young bride, and the sisters, who are walking and standing about. It is already the end of the second helpless day. They are looking at the horizon, listening to every sound which they try to catch from the stormy, windy weather. They try to hear in the wind the voices of their men, until they almost have the illusion that they are hearing voices.

One of these figures is a very young girl. Imagine her tragic face and movements. She is waiting for her bridegroom. Perhaps her young life will be broken. She knows what the life of a fisherman is – every day, every night, at every moment some tragedy can happen. We see her at the moment when she understands this fully and she realises that for her life may be over. Felicity must create this girl.

Now you must see another figure. A young woman – a wife waiting for her husband. She knows very well what it means to be the wife of a fisherman. She seems perhaps quieter than the young girl, but her experience of the tragedy is none the less keen. This wife will be played by Jocelyn.

There are many other figures – each enveloped in this tragic atmosphere which is suspended like as heavy stone above them. Then we see a very strange figure: an old, old woman, strangely dressed, walking in a strange manner. It is not easy to see what is happening to her – is she waiting for someone? Is she mad? Is she wise? An old, old woman who has had a long life of tragedy, which has bent her in her psychology and in her body. She no longer belongs to any family – she is alone. She is the condensed embodiment of the tragic life of the village – a figure which is no longer quite normal.

This old, strange woman always appears on the coast before a tragedy takes place. She knows something more than the others. She has a special feeling – almost second sight – for the tragic life of the village. What she does is strange but good, what she speaks is strange but necessary. She helps everyone, comforts them, and gives solace to everybody. Nobody knows how she lives, who gives her food, where she goes when everyone is in the village. She appears only at the crucial moment, and helps in a special way. She is the result of all of the tragic life of the village.

The watchers begin to see something on the horizon – perhaps some of the boats are coming back. It takes hours for the little boat to fight the waves. Is it joy that the people feel? This changes because it can clearly be seen that only one boat is coming back. Who will be in the boat? Try to imagine the feelings of the group.

Imagine the moment when the boat reaches the shore and only one fisherman steps out of the boat – the husband of Jocelyn. This one fisherman has experienced a tremendous fight with the stormy elements at sea. He has come back alone. He knows what this means. He is alive, but this is perhaps the most tragic moment for him, because he knows that all the other men are dead. Imagine his complicated state: bringing enormous joy to his wife and a tragic blow to everyone else. The joy of the wife is enormous and the tragedy

for everyone else is enormous. Her state is endless joy and endless tragedy at the same time.

Imagine the reactions of everybody else. What is the state of the young girl who has lost her bridegroom? What has happened to everyone else? Will they go home or will they continue to stand on the shore? Perhaps for some of them there is no longer any reason to go home. This is one big wave of tragedy. Perhaps for many years the life of the village will be quiet, and again a new wave of tragedy will strike it.

(14/01/1937, MC/S1/21/E)

## **Appendix IX: Les Copiaus and Compagnie des Quinze**

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### **Les Copiaus**

Following the closure of the VC theatre and the move to Burgundy in 1924, Copeau's presence and involvement with the work produced was patchy and often problematic. At various periods it was intermittent (as had been the case at the school in Paris) and by the last phase of LC's work he was absent. At various points he had no involvement at all in the theatre-making process of LC and he disassociated himself from a number of their shows (Rudlin 1986). In this context it is evident that Bing will have continued to operate as the central anchors for the school and company.

The artists who moved to Burgundy with their family members included Bing and her children (Bernard Bing and Claude Varese), Copeau, Agnès Thomsen (his wife) and their two younger children, Copeau's older daughter Dasté (nee Copeau), Georges Chennevière, Madame Chennevière, Jean Dasté, Jean Dorcy, Etienne Decroux, Aman Maistre, Miko Saint-Denis, Michel Saint-Denis, Suzanne Maistre Saint-Denis (Michel's sister), Leon Chancerel, Yvonne Galli, Marie-Madeleine Gautier, Marguerite Cavadaski, Clarita Stoessel and Michette Bossu. Four actors from the VC company, and their families also moved with them. This included August Boverio, Suzanne Boverio, Jean Villard, Charlotte Villard, Laurence Villard and François Vivert (See Rudlin 1986, p.84).

In Burgundy they were to rehearse outdoors as they had at Limon, were to focus on making the New Improvised Comedy and were to start to perform outdoors to a very different type of audience in barns, dance-halls and village/village squares. Whilst Rudlin acknowledges that the 'spirit and natural energy of the country festivals (in which the actors both participated and then, at

other times, were able to recreate through their own performances) was best expressed in works developed by the LC that resulted from collective creation of the whole troupe' (1986, p.28) he then argues that Copeau, as the 'dramaturg', 'found it necessary to provide much of the material, especially in the early years of the company's existence' (1986, p.28). Significantly, the one play Copeau had written, and performed solo (*Le Veuf* 1925) for LC's evening of debut performances was a failure<sup>1</sup> and never performed again. The other performances in this theatrical evening were better received.

In contrast to Copeau's position, Saint-Denis argued that it was in the late 1920s that the LC: 'were beginning to possess a more complete mode of expression, one rich in possibilities; we could act, dance, sing, improvise in all kinds of ways, and, when necessary, write our own dialogue. We were then ready to devise shows that used these special techniques' (Saint-Denis 1982, p.26-27).

### **Performances developed independent from Copeau**

*Le Printemps (Spring)* 1927

*La Guerre (War)* 1927

*La Danse de la ville et des champs (The Dance of the City and the Country)*  
1928

*Les Juenes Genes et l'araignee (The Young People and the Spider)* 1929

### **Some descriptive examples**

#### ***La Celebration du vin et del la vigne (Celebration of wine and vine)***

*La Celebration du vin et del la vigne* (Celebration of wine and vine) [was] designed to exploit their research in mime, gymnastics, and music. Unity was provided by the event's theme; partially improvised, partially scripted, its structure was analogous to a variety show. Copeau wrote part of the text and Saint-Denis the rest in the form of poems; Villard composed the music; and Jean Dasté

modeled the masks. Since the play was linked to the lives of the regions inhabitants, Saint-Denis and Villard gathered background material, interviewing farmhands and observing them at work. Incorporating the workers' chores into a fully developed performance was the logical and practical outcome of the task-orientated mimes practices as exercises. At times, the mimes were accompanied by songs; at others, the movement became dance through the strength of the rhythms.

(Baldwin 2003, p.31)

### ***Le Printemps (Spring)***

Jean Villard's description of the devising process:

He suggests the theme, outline, music, and some of the choreography; each member of the group added gestures, poses, a style. They kept what seemed best. Using a chorus and masks, this piece was a "living fresco" of the renewal of spring – the sap mounting in plants and trees, flowers opening, the wind blowing, animals playing in the forest in the midst of people, their work and their loves. The piece ended in Shakespearean festival manner, with weddings and accompanying songs and dances.

(Villard cited by Kusler 1979, p.65)

### **Compagnie des Quinze**

There is confusion on the exact dates for CQ, the first production was in January 1931 and last performance was autumn 1934 (see Baldwin 2003, p.57). Kurtz lists the ten company members as: Bing, Marguerite Cavadaski, Marie-Hélène Dasté, Marie-Madeleine Gautier, Auguste Boverio, Jean Dasté, Pierre Fresnay, Aman Maistre, Saint-Denis, and Jean Villard and the five students as: Marthe Herlin, Suzanne Maistre, Pierre Alder, Pierre Assy and Jean Saran. (1999, p.129)

### **Noé**

Kurkinen (2000) explains that '[...] Fresnay, who played the role of Noah, was compared to a giant marionette, and one of the villagers was said to wear a



semi-Japanese mask (p.168) and crucially in the context of embodied play she also notes that '[m]any reviewers make references to children's play or operetta' (ibid). She also cites the critic Baughan who explains that in the company's production of *Loire Obey* 'introduces an owl [...], a fox and an old oak tree. The daughters of Loire wear masks and speak staccato nonsense, and the waters of the Loire are grotesque pantomimic figures' (ibid).

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